



Journal of the
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Healthy Finances - but more members needed!

The RVW Society's Eighth AGM on 13 October 2002, at Charterhouse School, presented the best set of accounts since the formation of the Society. Total funds raised in the year were over £18,000 and a healthy surplus of £6,000 was carried forward. This surplus was achieved after expenditure on the permanent RVW Exhibition at All Saints Church, Down Ampney and after the costs of publishing Ursula Vaughan Williams's autobiography *Paradise Remembered*. Income from book sales was also up 538%, largely due to Ursula's book. Funds were improved by donations of more than £2,000 under gift aid. As John Francis, our Treasurer, put it at the AGM "an excellent year".

More Publications

Success in our book publishing ventures has given the Trustees more confidence in this area. Stephen Connock told the AGM that future plans include *There was a Time - RVW in Pictures*, from the photograph collection of Ursula Vaughan Williams, as well as the second edition of her *Collected Poems*. With *The Poisoned Kiss* scheduled for recording in early January 2003, and listed for release in October 2003, and a planned recording of *The Complete Songs*, future activities of the RVW Society are very positive.

And yet

As David Betts, our Membership Secretary, reported, membership had increased by only 72 in the year. This is

at least an increase, but the Trustees would like to see membership growth accelerate to allow us to achieve our target of 1,000 members by our 10th anniversary in 2004. All members are urged to help us achieve our goal and a membership application form is enclosed with the journal.

Eric Parkin

A highlight of the AGM was a superb lecture/recital by the distinguished pianist Eric Parkin. He provided us with fascinating insights into such composers as John Ireland, E J Moeran and Billy Mayerl. His playing of the music of these composers, together with some of Vaughan Williams's piano music, was lyrical and full of character, whilst also showing Eric Parkin at the height of his technical mastery of this field. A real treat!

Now, Heaven, send thee good fortune

At the end of the AGM, Robin Wells, Director of Music at Charterhouse, and his wife Stephanie, were warmly thanked for their hospitality, both at this year's AGM and at other AGMs since 1998. As this will be our last year at Charterhouse (Robin is retiring), we presented Robin and Stephanie with a lovely framed poster of Vaughan Williams, thanking them for their support over the years. This year the AGM is on 12 October and will be held at the Performing Arts Library, Denbies Wine Estate, London Road, Dorking, Surrey.

From Polly to The Wasps : The musical context

by Stephen Connock

At first glance, *The Poisoned Kiss* seems to stand alone in Vaughan Williams's music. It is a comic opera, with songs, duets, trios and ensembles interspersed with spoken dialogue. Furthermore, there are waltzes and tangos which raise a smile mainly because they are unexpected from a composer who was also writing *Job* and the percussive *Piano Concerto* at the same time. Yet Vaughan Williams was fully aware of an English light operatic tradition which had John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly* along with Gilbert and Sullivan in it. Within this tradition we have comic operas, 'ballad-operas' and musical comedies using sung numbers interspersed with spoken dialogue, in English and often – especially in the period before Gilbert and Sullivan – using old English airs and folk melodies.

Vaughan Williams had written about these trends in *The Music Student* just before the First World War:

“The history of English music has been one continual struggle between the natural musical proclivities of the English people and the social and artistic conditions which have prevented these national tendencies from pursuing their natural course.

There could be no more striking example of this than the history of English opera from 1720 to 1860. For it is a fact that, all through this period of Italian opera and fashionable Italian singers . . . there flowed a thin but very distinguishable stream of English opera.

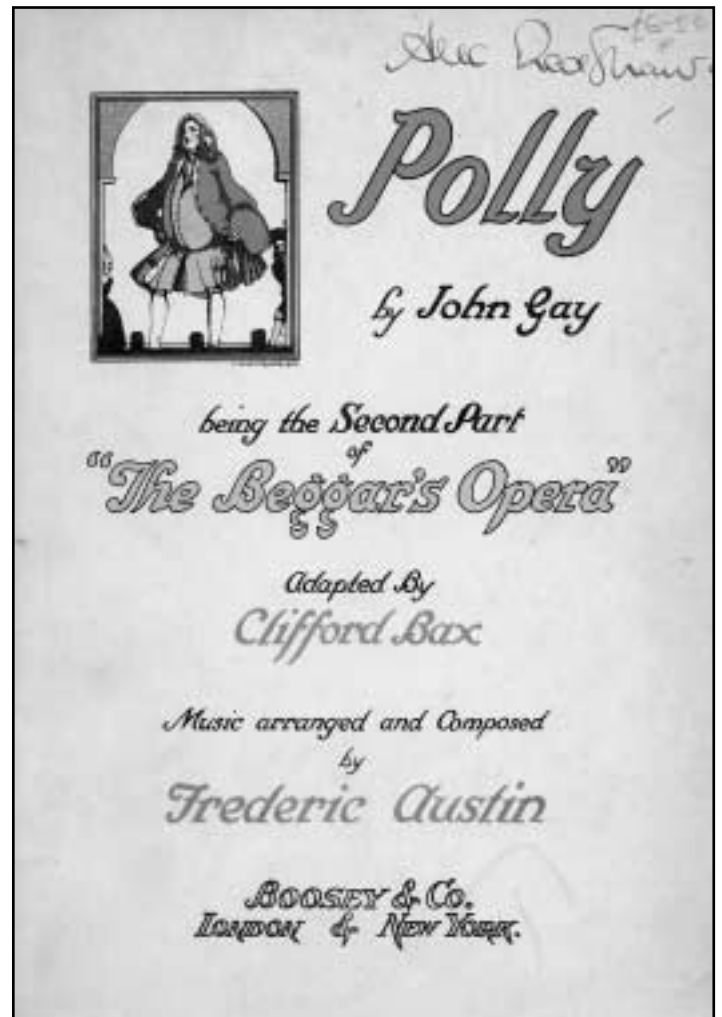
We can date this period of English opera to the year 1727, when *The Beggar's Opera* was produced. *The Beggar's Opera* is what we should nowadays call a “musical comedy”, and what the Germans call ‘sing-spiel’. That is a spoken comedy interspersed with songs.”

(See R Vaughan Williams: *British Music in the 18th and early 19th centuries* in *The Music Student*, Vol. 7, 1914-15, p.64).

Vaughan Williams adds that the great success of *The Beggar's Opera* led to all successful English opera of later dates, even when the music was original and not adapted. As he put it ‘the principle remains the same – the slight texture and almost invariable spoken dialogue instead of recitative . . .’. He adds that ‘the famous comic operas of Arthur Sullivan were in the direct line of this English tradition’.

With *The Poisoned Kiss*, a spoken comedy interspersed with songs, with its ‘slight texture’ and absence of recitative, Vaughan Williams was clearly writing an opera in an English tradition as he saw it. That this was very much on his mind is clear from the RVW – Evelyn Sharp correspondence. For example in his letter of early August 1927 he asks Evelyn Sharp for ‘a quiet lyrical quartet or quintet, with solo lines (e.g.

Sullivan's ‘Brightly dawns’ or “Tower Tomb” in “Yeoman of the Guard”) (270801, BL, p.3) In his letter of 18 August 1927 he says ‘If you happen to be stuck up for metres I have been studying ‘Polly’ and he gets some very good metres from fitting words to tunes’ (270818, BL, p.1)



Front cover of the score for Polly

Polly was what John Gay called the ‘second part’ of *The Beggar's Opera*. The score consisted of a number of short tunes, borrowed from traditional or contemporary sources, to which (as with *The Beggar's Opera*) an overture by Dr Pepusch had been added. For a revival at the Kingsway Theatre in London on December 30th 1922, conducted by Eugene Goossens, Clifford Bax had reconstructed the play itself and Frederic Austin had arranged and added to the music. This revival of *Polly* had been spurred by the success of the revival of *The Beggar's Opera* at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, which ran from 5th June 1920 for over 2,000 performances.



John Gay - a painting by William Hogarth

Both *Polly* and *The Beggar's Opera* are musical comedies, amusing with lovely melodies and songs. The lyrics are set to popular songs of the day. Both works are in three acts. As Vaughan Williams was studying *Polly* it is interesting to note that this opera has 52 sections, split as follows:

Act 1	1-17
Act 2	18-36
Act 3	37-52

The Poisoned Kiss (1936 edition) has 46 sections, split along these lines:

Act 1	1-17
Act 2	18-32
Act 3	33-46

As in *The Poisoned Kiss*, *Polly* has dances and interludes. The comparison need not be pressed too far - the point is that *The Poisoned Kiss* takes its place in a distinguished line of English comic opera, of which *Polly* was an early example.

And what of Gilbert and Sullivan? As noted above, Vaughan Williams draws Evelyn Sharp's attention to ensembles from both *The Mikado* and *Yeoman of the Guard*. *The Mikado* example is the quartet for Yum-Yum, Pitti-Sing, Nanki-Poo and Pish-Tush:

Brightly dawns our wedding day;
 Joyous how we give thee greeting!
 Whither, whither art thou fleeting?
 Fickle moment, prithee stay!
 What though mortal joys be hollow?
 Pleasures come, if sorrows follow . . .

The *Yeoman of the Guard* example is another quartet, this time for Fairfax, Sergeant Meryll, Dame Carruthers and Kate:

Strange adventure! Maiden wedded
 To a groom she's never seen –
 Never, never, never seen!
 Groom about to be beheaded
 In an hour on Tower Green!
 Tower, Tower, Tower Green!

Both quartets are high points in Sullivan's music, lyrical yet with beautiful solo lines emerging from the texture. In *The Poisoned Kiss*, the quartet *Father, where are you?* comes closest to this model, led by Tormentilla who sings a sweet lullaby:

Lullaby, sweet light of my eye,
 Zephyrs all laden with poisons draw nigh
 Sweet'ning your sleep as you languorously lie,
 Lullaby, lull-a-lullaby

Back in 1914, Vaughan Williams had written:

'Now that the Wagnerian boom is dying down, it is not impossible that English composers will once again take up the thread and develop to a much higher and nobler degree the tradition which has been handed down to them by the English opera composers from the time of Purcell'. (*The Music Student*, op.cit. p.64)

In 1927, Vaughan Williams seems to pick up his own challenge and to write an un-snobbish, English language, spoken dialogue-plus-sung-numbers comic opera. As he kept saying to Evelyn Sharp, he wanted the opera light hearted, not too high-falutin', the reverse of Wagnerian opera. He must have been amused by Richard Garnett's title for his book of short stories – *The Twilight of the Gods* – since Garnett's light-hearted fables are the antithesis of Wagner.

It is likely that Mozart's 'singspiel' *The Magic Flute* was another useful model for Vaughan Williams. We know he was impressed by the pioneering staging of it at Cambridge in 1911, in the English translation by his friend Edward Dent. Vaughan Williams's reaction was described as 'enthusiastic'. In this opera, there is a succession of arias and ensembles with linking spoken dialogue (often omitted in recordings). The central figures of Sarastro (a magician comparable to Dipsacus), the Queen of the Night (Persicaria), Tamino (Amaryllus) and Pamina (Tormentilla), along with a pair of lower order characters in both operas, does tempt comparison with *The Poisoned Kiss*.

One final influence on Vaughan Williams's *The Poisoned Kiss* is much closer to home: his own incidental music for *The Wasps*. Written in 1909 for a Cambridge production of the play by Aristophanes, the complete score comprises 18 sections in three acts for tenor and baritone soloists, male chorus and orchestra. With its songs interspersing spoken dialogue, its wit, satire and contemporary feel, it is a clear precedent for *The Poisoned Kiss*. Vaughan Williams had shown a liking for the spoken dialogue-plus-sung-numbers routine. *The Wasps* was quickly followed by his all-sung 'ballad opera' *Hugh the Drover* – Vaughan Williams knew exactly what he was saying by use of this historically important English opera sub-title – and *Hugh* was being worked on again in the years immediately preceding composition of *The Poisoned Kiss*. So, from *Polly* to *The Wasps*, the musical context is clear and revealing.

(The author would like to acknowledge the help of Roger Savage in relation to this article who, over lunch, stimulated some of the lines of enquiry which were then followed up.)

Crossword Solutions Across: 1. Down Ampney, 8. Hod, 9. Bloody, 11. Ton, 12. Easter, 14. Golden, 15. Axe, 17. Sonata, 18. Dan, 19. Sine Nomine.	Down: 2. Old, 3. Nielsen, 4. Mayor, 5. Navy, 6. White Gates, 7. Shining One, 10. Isle, 11. Tide, 13. Rootham, 16. Onion, 17. Swan, 18. Den.
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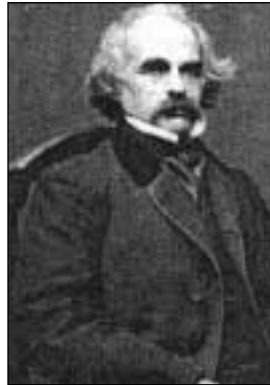
“IT WILL BE ALRIGHT IN THE END” THE COMPLEX EVOLUTION OF THE LIBRETTO

by *Stephen Connock*

The story for *The Poisoned Kiss* begins in 1846 and ends in 1981 with the publication by OUP of the final revised edition. It is a complicated evolution and Vaughan Williams had a major hand, as we shall see, in both the shape and detail of the libretto. This article examines the role of his chosen librettist, Evelyn Sharp, and touches on the role of William Foss, of Oxford University Press (OUP), and, more importantly, Ursula Vaughan Williams in relation to the text. Evelyn Sharp's life is considered in more detail in a separate article (see page 8).

Nathaniel Hawthorne

We begin with the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story *Rappaccini's Daughter*, published in 1846 in his collection *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Hawthorne (1804-1864) was born in Salem, Mass. and is best remembered today for his powerful story of adultery, guilt, secrecy and passion, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). His use of allegory and symbolism influenced Emerson and Whitman and he was at the forefront of the development of the short story as a distinctive American genre.



Nathaniel Hawthorne

Rappaccini's Daughter is a powerful short story which ends bleakly. It concerns Giovanni Guasconti, a handsome student newly enrolled at the University of Padua. He takes lodgings in an old mansion which overlooks a resplendent garden, cultivated by the old, sickly and thoughtworn Dr Rappaccini. The young man notices that the doctor tends to the garden in thick gloves and a face mask. He has a beautiful daughter, Beatrice, who can touch the gorgeous flowers without protection. All the young men of Padua are wild about this simple and sweet girl who 'glowed amid the sunlight'. Giovanni is captivated by Beatrice, and by the garden, and arranges to meet her. She in turn becomes spellbound by his looks and charm. In the garden, he goes to admire and touch a particularly beautiful plant, only to find Beatrice shrieking 'Touch not! It is fatal!' She explains that her father has brought her up within this poisonous garden, such that for her 'poison was an element of life.' Although her rich beauty was a madness to him, he acknowledges she is as 'poisonous as she is beautiful'. Beatrice adds 'though my body be nourished with poisons, my spirit is God's creature and craves love as its daily food'.

Giovanni resolves to free Beatrice from her poisonous addiction by offering her an antidote. If this doesn't work, he adds "let us join our lips in one kiss ... and so die!" She takes the antidote whilst challenging her father, Dr Rappaccini: 'why did you inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?' Rappaccini, it seems, has been indulging a scientific experiment, one destined to empower his daughter with such strength that all would be quelled by her influence. Meanwhile the antidote was having a terrible effect: as poison had been her life, so the powerful antidote was her death. Beatrice dies as a result of her father's perverted attempt at wisdom.

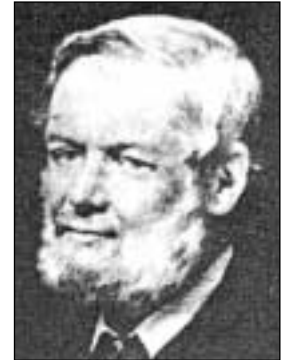
Hawthorne's descriptive powers are considerable and the themes of *The Scarlet Letter* emerge – love, fate, troubled and feverish emotions, temptation, the force of passion. It is also a diatribe against intellectual zeal and academic vanity.

This powerful and moving short-story contains many of the elements which would appear in Vaughan Williams's opera *The Poisoned Kiss*: the beautiful maiden who lives on poison, the role of antidotes, the obsessive and powerful father. Some of the language of Hawthorne, for example

the use of the word 'evanesce' turns up in Evelyn Sharp's libretto. However, another short-story has a more direct influence – this is Dr Richard Garnett's *The Poison Maid*.

Richard Garnett

Richard Garnett (1835–1906) was Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum. He was a poet, critic and man of letters, whose best original work was the collection of short stories, *The Twilight of the Gods*, published in 1888. There is a gentle irony and humour in those stories which is quite delightful.



Dr Richard Garnett

The Poison Maid is the last story in the collection. A footnote says 'The author wrote this tale in entire forgetfulness of Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter', which nevertheless he had certainly read'. Garnett's tale involves Mithridata who has been brought up by her father, the magician Locusto on arsenic, opium and prussic acid. Her father tells her 'thy kiss would be fatal to anyone not fortified by a course of antidotes'. Her father plots the death of a young prince by this one kiss – revenge for an earlier act involving the prince's father, the King 'whose father slew my father'.

Mithridata rebels: 'I will not be the cause of his death'. In typical Garnett humour, her father replies: 'O, these daughters! We bring them up tenderly and when all is done they will not so much as commit a murder to please us!'. Her father disinherits her. She finds herself rescued by a handsome young man who kisses her. It transpires that far from killing this young man, who is revealed as the prince, the King had fathomed Locusto's vengeful plot and brought his son up on antidotes. All is well, for the 'kiss of love is the remedy for every poison.'

Evelyn Sharp (1869-1955)

Vaughan Williams knew the Garnett short story well and, as Ursula Vaughan Williams tells us, he had thought that the story 'had the makings of a light opera'. (See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, OUP 1964, p. 209). His choice of Evelyn Sharp as librettist was an interesting one. Why her? She had been a journalist on the *Manchester Guardian*, had



RVW and Evelyn Sharp in 1936

contributed to the *Yellow Book* and was the writer of fairy tales and children's books. She had also written a short story in 1902 called *The Spell of the Magician's Daughter*, published in a book of Victorian Fairytales, edited by Jack Zipes. This tale is full of poisoned kiss-type illusions. This and her use of satire and symbolism in these – and in *The Loafer and the Loaf* of 1925 – would have seemed to Vaughan Williams well suited to developing Garnett's gentle fable, with its humour and irony, into a full libretto. She was the sister of Cecil Sharp, a close friend and fellow folk-song collector, and therefore to be trusted; shared sadness at his death in 1924 may have drawn composer and future librettist closer together. Finally, as a politician and suffragette, she could be relied upon to invest the libretto with contemporary wit and relevance.

So far, so good. By July 1927 Evelyn Sharp had proposed a libretto and Vaughan Williams was working on Act I. Interestingly Miss Sharp had

The Poisoned Kiss

opted for characters with botanical names, following Hawthorne's luxurious garden, and introduced a neat symmetry in the characters. As Frank Howes points out, each main character has an equal and an opposite :

Tormentilla	-	Amaryllus
Angelica	-	Gallanthus
Empress	-	Dipsacus
3 Hobgoblins	-	3 Mediums

(see Frank Howes *The Poisoned Kiss* in *Monthly Musical Record*, June 1936, p. 97).

Evelyn Sharp and Vaughan Williams had decided from the outset to introduce spoken dialogue into the libretto. The outline of Garnett was there: revengeful magician father, young lovers, clever use of antidotes, the initial fear that the poisoned kiss would be the lover's doom, happy reconciliation at the end as love unites. To this simple tale, Evelyn Sharp added many contemporary references, mainly in the spoken dialogue. Thus we find references to 'state control', to Freud and the Oedipus complex, to the 'Marconigram', to the cricketer Jack Hobbs (in a word play on 'Hob') who had hit his hundredth first class hundred in 1923 and was specially featured in *Wisden* in 1926, to women MPs and the 'distressing result of the higher education of women'. When the Empress Persicaria summons Angelica to her side she says 'Come hither by Underground'. Gallanthus, in an aside, points out this is the quickest way – clearly the tube system in 1927 was in better shape than today.

Evelyn Sharp introduced humour, therefore, although of a kind that can sound dated and contrived. Occasionally, it still works:

Angelica:	Well, it's like this. Tormentilla's kiss is a poison kiss, see?
Gallanthus:	A poison kiss? What's that?
Angelica:	She's been trained to poison the first man she kisses
Gallanthus:	Lumme, what are modern girls coming to!

or, in Act III:

Empress:	Ah, Dipsacus, have you forgotten what you once said to me?
Dipsacus:	I hope so!
Empress:	I have not forgotten!
Dipsacus:	That's the worst of women. They never forget anything.

However, by early August 1927, Vaughan Williams was taking a stronger line regarding the libretto. Whilst insisting that 'I don't believe in dictating to other people' he suggests what each character should say, how each character is to be delineated (for example, neologisms reserved for Angelica "in contrast to the purely romantic speeches of Tormentilla" (Letter 270801, BL, p.2), the order of events and the type of metre the composer wants. As Vaughan Williams puts it 'occasional short lines and mid-rhymes are useful to a composer – also 5 and 7 lines occasionally (not always 4 or 6). Then we want some pure and lyric romantic movements I think to give the poor sentimental old composer a chance' (Letter 270801, BL, p. 2-3).

Subsequent correspondence between the composer and librettist shows Vaughan Williams making ever more detailed suggestions. He is sensitive to Evelyn Sharp's levels of patience at all this - he hopes she has 'learnt to put up with me' (280912, BL, p.1) and that 'You will have patience with me' (270923, BL, p.1). By 1931 he writes: "are you tired of the whole thing and would you prefer some arrangement by which you

should hand all your work over to me and have no more to do with it . . . ?" (311106, BL). In 1935, Vaughan Williams begins his letter to his librettist with 'I need hardly say that I am writing about the opera which by this time you must be heartily tired of' (351224, BL, p.1).

The essence of the difficulty between composer and librettist is uncertainty over how serious the opera should be and about whether *The Poisoned Kiss* was to be a musical comedy or real comic opera. In the surviving correspondence, Vaughan Williams likes the lyrics but has serious problems with the opera dramatically. In a letter of 12 September 1928 he says of Act II: "I feel it is rather too serious and grand operatic" (280912, BL, p.3). By December 1929 he is still trying "to prevent the thing from becoming too high-falutin'" (291217, BL, p.1). As to the dilemma about musical comedy v. real comic opera, Vaughan Williams says:

'In musical comedy (or ballad opera) the music is purely incidental, i.e. the music could be left out and the drama would remain intact. In comic opera at certain points (usually the finale) the drama is carried on through the music – the only difference this makes to the librettist is that in certain places the drama goes on in verse and not in prose – and usually in short sentences not long songs' (270818, BL, p.1-2).

Vaughan Williams then points out changes that are necessary if the work is to be a comic opera: strengthening the ensemble in Act I and introducing a choral set song at the end of Act III.

Evelyn Sharp laid out her difficulties in an important and revealing letter of 14 September 1928:

'I don't pretend to know what is effective on the stage; you have written operas and I haven't, and seeing that it is a fluke in any case you are much more likely to be right than I am. Besides, the music must decide finally because it is the more important of the two. So please go ahead if the spirit moves you, without waiting for consultation. I am sure it will work out all right in the end'

In May 1936, after the first performance in Cambridge, Vaughan Williams was still worrying that the opera 'is not quite amusing enough'. He feels that the end of Act I is 'scrappy' and whole episodes are either long winded 'partly owing to the fact that we have to tell it over twice in dialogue and in song' (360515, BL, p.1). He had already cut 20 minutes of music for the first performance, and Evelyn Sharp had cut much of the dialogue, but Vaughan Williams remained dissatisfied. In a letter of extraordinary candour between composer and librettist, of 15 May 1936, he asks categorically for some lines to be deleted which he regards as 'facetious'. He admits that 'the low comedy part . . . alarmed me in cold print' and wonders whether one would care to hear the libretto twice. Finally, he adds 'I think generally all through the opera we have too many explanations about poisons etc.' (360515, BL, p.2).

These are remarkable admissions seven years after they began working on the opera. That Vaughan Williams remained dissatisfied is ever clearer from a letter dated January 4th 1942, contained in the BBC Archives, from the composer to the conductor Stanford Robinson. In it he says:

'I wish you could find me a first class librettist. The really good playwrights won't write libretti. I recoil with horror from the hack librettist, however much he may know about stage business.

Three of my operas have at all events good libretti:

- (1) *Sir John in Love*
- (2) *Riders to the Sea*
- (3) *The Shepherds*

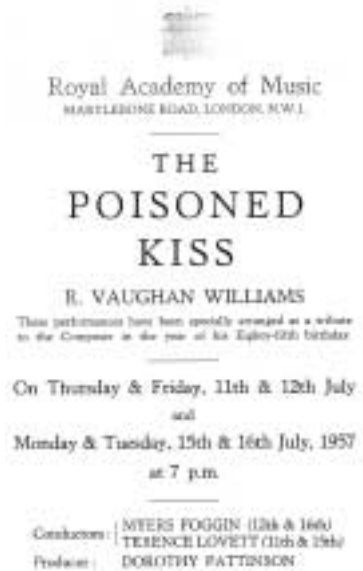
(BBC Written Archives Centre, File 910, VW – composer)

The omission of both *Hugh the Drover* and *The Poisoned Kiss* is striking.

The Poisoned Kiss

Final revisions

The evolution of the libretto was now moving to its final revisions. OUP agreed to publish the opera, with a number of conditions about the libretto, which was revised by Hubert Foss's brother William in 1932. With the death of Evelyn Sharp on 17 June 1955, Vaughan Williams suggested to Alan Frank, at the OUP, that the complete rights to the text of *The Poisoned Kiss* should be purchased from her Executors. This went ahead. A performance of the opera at Cheltenham Grammar School in April 1956 stimulated the composer to a further major revision of the work, this time with the help of Ursula Vaughan Williams. As Vaughan Williams put it in a letter to Alan Frank of 18th August 1956, 'Ursula is toying with the idea of doing it all in alexandrines or rhyming couplets' (560818a, BL) The new version was first performed at the Royal Academy of Music on 11th July 1957.



These final revisions were quite fundamental. The main changes between the 1936 edition and the 1957 version can be summarised as follows:

Act I

- Deletion of section of opening chorus
- Removal of opening verses of Ensemble: 'Father, where are you?'
- Deletion of Amaryllus's song 'I thought I loved Maria'
- Deletion of Dipsacus's ballad 'The sun it shone'
- Deletion of Trio 'I refuse to adopt'

Act II

- Deletion of Trio 'Today when all the world'
- Deletion of Tormentilla's song 'Let my tears flow'
- Removal of opening stanza of Tormentilla's song 'There was a time!'

Act III

- Deletion of Ensemble: 'The Angry Spirit'
- Deletion of chorus of Hobgoblins 'Out of the morn'.
- Deletion of Melodrama and Dipsacus's music

The final running order for the opera, with timings, is as follows:

Act I	Mins.
Overture	7.00
No. 1 Opening Chorus	3.30
No. 2 Scena (Gallanthus)	2.30
No. 3 Scena (Angelica)	4.30
No. 4 Duet	3.00
No. 5 Ensemble	2.30
No. 6 Duet	2.30
No. 7 Duet	2.30
No. 8 Ensemble	3.00
No. 9 Duet	3.30
No. 10 Ensemble	3.00
No. 11 Song	2.00
Nos. 12 and 13 Finale	4.00
Timing for Act I	43.30

Act II

	Mins.
14 Introduction	1.00
15 Chorus	2.30
16/16A Song	3.00
17 Trio	2.30
18 Duet	2.30
19 Trio	3.00
20/20A Chorus and song	3.00
21 Song and Duet	4.00
22 Ensemble	3.00
23 Serenade	2.30
23A Duet	2.30
24 Ensemble	3.00
25 Finale	3.30
Timing for Act II	36.00

Act III

	Mins.
26 Introduction	1.00
27 Trio	3.00
27A/27B/28 Ensemble	3.00
29 Ballad	2.30
30 Ensemble	2.00
31 Duet	2.30
32 Invocation	2.30
33 Ensemble	4.00
34 Duet	2.00
35 Quartet	2.00
36 Sextet	2.00
37 Duet	2.30
38 Finale	4.30
Timing for Act III	33.30
Overall timing for complete opera	113.00



Ursula Vaughan Williams with members of the cast of *The Poisoned Kiss*, Edinburgh 1971

Assessment

Ursula Vaughan Williams cut, revised, simplified and softened the linking dialogue. Her rhymed couplets are a considerable improvement on the prose originals. The libretto is closer to Richard Garnett than before, lighter and more romantic. Most of the rather dated 1920s references have disappeared (Marconigram, London Underground, Oedipus complex, etc). Perhaps the wit of the Sharp version has gone with it but the final version is closer to what Vaughan Williams had been asking for all along. Some embarrassments remain. For example, *Love in a hut* is still there, to these revised words:

Love in a hut,
Is picturesque, but,
I owe it's disaster
Unless you've been wise.
Insist on good heating.
Also some adequate neatening. (etc)

The plot overall must not be taken seriously – it is after all a 'romantic extravaganza'. The libretto, like all good fairy stories, would work out alright in the end – and so it proved.

Notices for first performance

SADLER'S WELLS
 by arrangement with Lilian Bayliss, C.H., M.A.(Oxon) (Hon.),
 LL.D.(Birm.) (Hon.), and the Governors of Sadler's Wells

Monday, MAY 18th, at 8.15 p.m.

ONE
 LONDON PERFORMANCE ONLY
 OF
THE POISONED KISS
 R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS'S First Comic Opera
 Libretto by EVELYN SHARP
 Cambridge University Opera Society
 Producer: Camille Prior Designer: Gwendolen Raverat

CONDUCTED BY THE COMPOSER
 Trefor Jones Mabel Ritchie
 Geoffrey Dunn Margaret Field-Hyde
 Frederick Woodhouse Meriel St. Clair

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1. Poster advertising the first London performance of The Poisoned Kiss, May 18 1936

'THE POISONED KISS'

Characters in the order of their appearance:

ANGELICA, Tormentilla's Maid and Companion	MARGARET FIELD-HYDE
GALLANTHUS, the Prince's Attendant	GEOFFREY DUNN
HOB	The Magician's Hobgoblins
GOB	
LOB	
DIPSACUS, a Professional Magician,	FREDERICK WOODHOUSE
AMARYLLUS, the Prince, son of the Empress	TREFOR JONES
TORMENTILLA, the Magician's Daughter	MABEL RITCHIE
1ST MEDIUM	The Empress's Assistants in amateur magic
2ND MEDIUM	
3RD MEDIUM	
EMPRESS PERSICARIA, Reigning Sovereign in Golden Town; an Amateur Magician	MARIE HOWES ENA MITCHELL BARBARA DIGBY
A PHYSICIAN	MERIEL ST. CLAIR
	DONALD BEVES

2. The cast for the first performances of The Poisoned Kiss

Evelyn Sharp - writer and suffragette

by Stephen Connock

Evelyn Sharp was born in 1869 in Denmark Hill, London. She had three sisters and seven brothers – the eldest being Cecil Sharp. An uneventful early life changed when she resolved to move to central London in 1894. She sent one of her short stories to the editor of *the Yellow Book* and an unpublished novel to Bodley Head, and was delighted to succeed in both. On *the Yellow Book* she joined contributors such as Arthur Symons, Max Beerbohm, H.G.Wells and, interestingly, Richard Garnett. She met Thomas Hardy in 1907.

As a feature writer for the *Manchester Guardian* from 1905, she was sent to cover women's issues. Hearing the actress and writer Elizabeth Robins deliver a suffrage speech in 1906, she resolved to fight for 'social and economic freedom for women, as well as for political equality with men'. She joined the Women's Social and Political Union in 1906 and published *Rebel Women*, a series of vignettes of suffragette life, in 1910.

On November 11, 1911, she was arrested for throwing stones at War Office windows near Trafalgar Square. She had been selected by the Suffragette leadership to carry out a new policy of breaking Government office windows.

She was sentenced to 14 days in Holloway Prison. In July 1913 she was arrested again for protesting outside Caxton Hall in London against the 'Cat and Mouse' Act. Sentenced to another 14 days imprisonment, she went on hunger strike and was released after four days. As she said after this hunger strike:



Evelyn Sharp in Yellow Book days

'Only the sense of fighting for a cause for which one is prepared to die could give anybody the strength or the will to go on with it after the first day or two.' (See Evelyn Sharp, *Unfinished Business*, 1933 p.147)

By 1916 she was a member of the executive of the National Council for Adult Suffrage.

With the Reform Bill receiving Royal Assent in February 1918, Evelyn Sharp found other causes. She became connected with Sinn Fein in Ireland and visited Russia in the early 1920s. From 1923 she took on issues of poverty at home, using her base in journalism to raise the profile of social problems. Her brother Cecil Sharp died on Midsummer's Eve 1924, around which time – significantly perhaps for her forthcoming collaboration with Vaughan Williams – she became interested in folk dance and wrote a short book on it dedicated to Cecil's memory, *Here we go round* (1928).

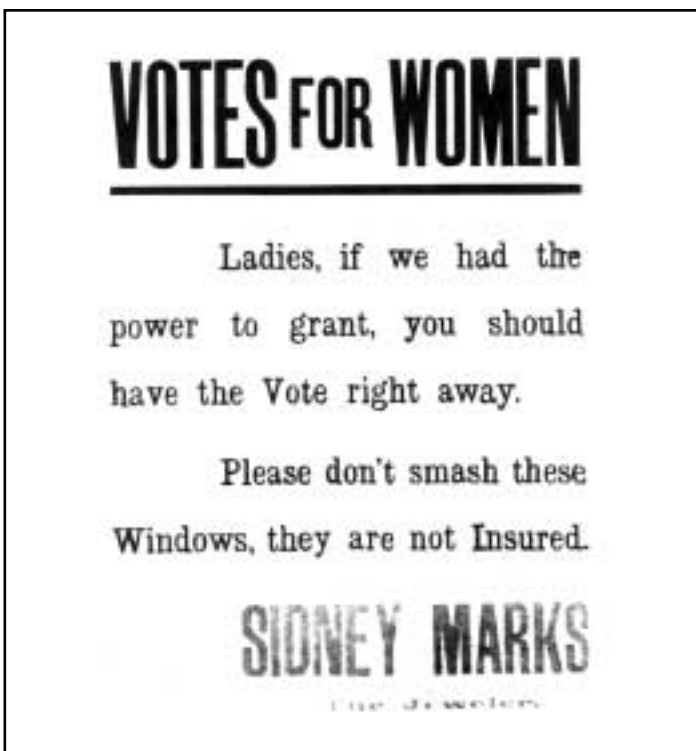
In 1925 she wrote a slight comedy for the Players of the Parliamentary Party called *The Loafer and the Loaf*. This was an 'extravaganza' as her libretto for Vaughan Williams was to become, though with a clearer political message.

By 1927, when she started collaborating with Vaughan Williams on *The Poisoned Kiss*, she was busy with articles about Emmeline Pankhurst and was a member of the Relief Committee of the Society of Friends in Berlin. In 1927 she took a short holiday alone in the Channel Islands to write the first lyrics for *The Poisoned Kiss*. After that she struggled to keep up with Vaughan Williams's requirements for the libretto. An autobiography, *Unfinished Adventure*, published in 1933, devotes just 17 words to her collaboration with RVW, except for a friendly jibe about his spidery handwriting. Given the space in her book devoted to, say, the Shepherd's Bush Advisory Committee on Juvenile Employment (1927) her priorities were clearly social and economic issues, rather than comic opera. She also, as she put it in her autobiography, found it easier "to write good tragedy rather than good comedy", see *Unfinished Business*, 1933 page 304.

Evelyn Sharp married her lifelong friend H.W. Nevinson in 1933, six months after his wife's death. He died in 1941. Evelyn Sharp herself lived on until 1955, earning her place in history as a writer and suffragette.



Evelyn Sharp in 1933



Votes for women - a notice from 1912

'Once upon a time . . . An analysis of the opera

by Stephen Connock

As if to emphasize the fairy-tale quality of *The Poisoned Kiss*, Ursula Vaughan Williams's introduction to the 1981 edition of the score, begins thus:

'Once upon a time a young magician and a young Empress hoped to marry but her parents forbid the match. Both young people married others. But the magician, Dipsacus, hot for revenge against the Empress, whom he wrongly blamed, brought up his only daughter, Tormentilla, on poisons so that the first man she kissed would die. He knew that the Empress had a son and he planned that his daughter should be the cause of her son's death.

The Empress, cleverer than he, knew of this and brought up her son, Amaryllus, on antidotes, so that when fate brought the young people together and inevitably made them fall in love, the first kiss was not fatal though at first it seemed so, for Amaryllus fainted from pure joy. When he was brought home he did nearly die from the pain of being separated from his love.

Eventually the Empress relented and allowed Tormentilla to see him. Amaryllus's happiness was so great that his mother was touched to the heart. She summoned Dipsacus – long a widower as she had been long a widow – and all differences were healed. Not only did he and the Empress marry but also her ladies in waiting married his attendant hobgoblins. The prince, of course, married Tormentilla, while her faithful companion, Angelica, married his friend and squire, Gallanthus. And they all lived happily for ever after.'

This 'romantic extravaganza' is in three acts in an uncertain time, probably about the period of *Lord of the Rings*. Act I is set in the Magician's haunt in the forest, Act II is in Tormentilla's apartment in Golden Town a week later and Act III is in the Empress's Palace the next day.

Evelyn Sharp's libretto is carefully delineated across these three acts. Act I is dominated by Dipsacus and his thirst for revenge juxtaposed with the poetry and romance of the young lovers. Act II belongs to Tormentilla and Amaryllus – it is less comical and more romantic, even 'grand operish' in its mysterious and atmospheric final pages. Act III introduces the Empress Persicaria, for the first time. All is explained and reconciled, and love is triumphant.

Overture

The delightful Overture contains some of the main melodies which are arranged to provide an extrovert opening and closing with the lovely tune from the duet *Blue larkspur in a garden* in Act I providing lyrical contrast. This arrangement resembles the Overture to *The Wasps*. The composer seeks to establish the comic nature of proceedings by requesting the audience 'not to refrain from talking during the Overture – otherwise they will know all the tunes before the opera begins!' Vaughan Williams adds for good measure that the Overture should be played with the house lights up.

The melodies of the opera are often folk-based without actually quoting folksong.

Act I

1. Opening chorus

The action takes place outside Dipsacus's house in the forest. The stage is in darkness. A confused noise of owls, bats, cats etc. is heard. The night chorus enters (tenors and basses) with:

Secret are the sounds of night,
Whisp'ring voices, whirring flight

Whilst Night hopes to banish day, the Day Chorus enter (sopranos and altos) to an outburst of larks and cuckoos:

Powers of light in proud array,
Banish darkness! Bring forth day.

At this, the edge of the sun appears, but soon goes down again as the Night Chorus continue their nocturnal chanting. Up and down again goes the sun, lastly falling with a loud bump. At this Dipsacus enters, annoyed that someone is delaying the morning. The chorus disappear in much haste.

2. Scena (Gallanthus)

Gallanthus appears, nervously given the strange noises on stage, and sings an initial 2/4 *allegro* before the music reverts to the opening 4/4 time. Gallanthus pulls himself together and notices Dipsacus's house for the first time.

3. Scena (Angelica, later Gallanthus)

Angelica suddenly appears at a window to the house. Gallanthus hides. The sun comes up. Angelica enters carrying a broom and duster. Harp arpeggios and a lovely flute melody set an idyllic scene reminiscent of the daybreak music in Act II of *Hugh the Drover*.

She sings:

Day is dawning
Folks are yawning
Sleepy maids unbolt the doors.

Angelica's lovely pastoral aubade contrasts with *allegro* passages:

Scrub and rub-a-dub
What a hub-a-bub

Gallanthus emerges from his hiding place and picks up Angelica's refrain.

Spoken dialogue

Angelica and Gallanthus flirt with each other before Angelica reveals she works for Tormentilla who lives on poisons, and plays with snakes all day. Angelica and Gallanthus are very attracted to one another....

4. Duet (Angelica and Gallanthus)

Gallanthus breaks into a ballad-style melody:

It's really time I did begin
To make a mild endeavour
A pretty little wife to win
Provided she's not clever

The Poisoned Kiss

Angelica follows and then they sing a verse together. It is in Vaughan Williams's gentle, lyrical vein; it could be sung by Aunt Jane in *Hugh the Drover*. Angelica and Gallanthus embrace rather shyly.

5. Ensemble (Dipsacus and Hobgoblins)

The romantic mood is quickly dispelled as Dipsacus summons his hobgoblins, Hob, Gob and Lob, together with a forest chorus of witches, goblins etc. The hobgoblins complain that everything they do is wrong:

Always work and never play
Stingy food and stingy pay
Never butter, but margarine
A lizard's fare is confounded mean

Evelyn Sharp's wit works well here. Dipsacus enters irritated at his hobgoblin's slackness in leaving him to fix his own potions.

Spoken dialogue

Dipsacus reveals that today is the time of his revenge, and that his plot was laid when Tormentilla was new born.

6. Duet (Dipsacus and Angelica)

Dipsacus sings:

I'm a sorcerer bold
In me you behold
The last of the Wizards,
Who's not state-controlled

It is a patter song with a catchy dance rhythm interposed between verses. References to state control and Freud remain – many other contemporary witticisms were removed in the 1957 revision.

7. Duet (Amaryllus and Gallanthus)

Amaryllus enters, after exchanging a few words with Gallanthus on the subject of women and his previous love affairs. They begin a beguiling duet on Amaryllus's past loves:

It's true I'm inclined to be fickle,
But a man is a prig who would stickle
At changing his fate
Before it's too late with another to mate
Who might happen his fancy to tickle.

Even allowing for a comic opera libretto, the poetry here is poor yet the music is alluring and heart-warming.

Spoken dialogue

Amaryllus reveals he has seen Tormentilla, and fallen in love. Tormentilla is playing with her pet cobra, which Amaryllus strikes down thinking she is in danger. Tormentilla believes her pet is dead. Gallanthus reveals that Tormentilla has been brought up on poisons. Amaryllus decides to disguise himself as a goatherd so that if Tormentilla loves him it will be for himself rather than because he is royal. Meanwhile, Tormentilla realises her sweet snake is alive, and comforts the dazed creature.

8. Ensemble (Tormentilla, Angelica, Amaryllus and Gallanthus)

The opening lullaby (*andantino*) is quite gorgeous:

Lullaby, lovely serpent of mine,
Subtle thy dreams, full of pleasures malign

As Tormentilla rocks the injured cobra to sleep, Amaryllus, touched and increasingly passionate, joins in while Angelica and Gallanthus keep the humour going lest proceedings get 'too high falutin'. The quartet turns into an animated patter song *allegro* as Amaryllus tries to prevent Tormentilla drinking her usual poisoned refreshments.

9. Duet (Tormentilla and Amaryllus)

In an opera full of marvellous tunes, this duet between Tormentilla and Amaryllus, as each describes in turn the things they enjoy, contains one of the most beautiful of the song-melodies in the opera:

Blue larkspur in a garden,
White clouds in summer skies,
A seagull pausing wing-stretch'd,
The love in a woman's eyes,

Andante sostenuto $\text{♩} = 60$ AMARYLLUS (sentimentally)

Blue larkspur in a gar-den,

Amar. White clouds in sum- - mer skies, A - sea-gull paus- ing -

Amar. wing-stretch'd, The love in a wo - - man's - eyes.

As Amaryllus and Tormentilla sing a verse each, marked 'sentimentally', and then a verse together, their love deepens. Tormentilla still believes he is a goatherd. Amaryllus is ecstatic and confirms that Tormentilla is for him the beginning of true love - all the other girls are forgotten.

10. Ensemble (Dipsacus, Hobgoblins, Angelica, Amaryllus and Gallanthus)

Proceedings become more romantic as Dipsacus enters with a great invocation:

North wind, South wind,
Hither, come hurry,

A storm keeps the lovers apart, as the hobgoblins threaten.

Spoken dialogue

It is now time for Dipsacus to explain what is going on. He tells Tormentilla of his love for a lady in Golden Town when he was young. He was let down by the woman and forced to leave the town. Subsequently, both married others and this woman had a son, and Dipsacus a daughter. Dipsacus plotted revenge across the years. His wife died and he fed his daughter, Tormentilla, on poison such that her first kiss is death. He will use his powers to ensure her poisoned kiss is for the son of his enemy. Tormentilla objects – 'O father, what a horrible, horrible thing to do!' Dipsacus is furious with her and immediately disowns and banishes her. Angelica remains positive and both she and Tormentilla resolve to run away to Golden Town, taking a little of the magician's wishing stone lest they need new dresses . . .

11. Song (Tormentilla)

Tormentilla remains downcast and laments her sad predicament in a gentle song:

Oh, who would be unhappy me
Brought up on Prussic Acid?

The melody is mock - wistful and the lyrics clever. Vaughan Williams's melody at:

Ah, hear my plea,
Ah, fly with me!
Dear lover mine,

is in his most romantic vein - straight from *Hugh the Drover*.

Poco Più Mosso

Ah, hear my plea, Ah, fly from me!

Tor. Dear lov-er mine, Not thine, not thine!

The Poisoned Kiss

12. Entry music

Angelica has rubbed the wishing stone, and messengers and milliners magically arrive with the newest frocks and hats.

13. Finale (Tormentilla, Angelica, Dipsacus, Hobgoblins)

The milliners and messengers remain on stage for the finale of Act I. Dipsacus has learnt the fatal spell necessary to banish Tormentilla and Angelica and deliver the poisoned kiss. He sings: 'All is ready'!

Angelica and Tormentilla sing 'All is ready', too, as they view the latest frocks from Dublin, Paris and London. The curtain comes down on Dipsacus, with hobgoblins and forest chorus around him, conjuring up fearful magic.

Act II

14. Introduction

Act II opens with Tormentilla's apartment in Golden Town. A week has passed. A short orchestral introduction, *andante moderato*, introduces a sensuous melody for wind and harp.

15. Chorus

A chorus of flower girls enter, carrying bouquets of flowers or sweets:

Here we come, our hands full laden,
Bringing gifts to charm a maiden,

Frank Howes pointed out that the music seems like a sly illusion to the Flower Maidens in *Parsifal*, or the Bridesmaids in *Ruddigore*. The music has a perfunctory charm aided by lyrics contrasting romance with bathos.

16. Song and chorus (Angelica and flower girls)

A delightful mock waltz to the words:

By all the powers
Ne'er saw I such flowers!

The girls dance around the rooms arranging the flowers. One can sense Vaughan Williams's enjoyment in this rhythmically complex song. With Tormentilla's admirers sending flowers, sweets, odes and sonnets, the stage darkens . . .

17. Trio (Hob, Gob and Lob)

The hobgoblins enter to lightning strikes. They laugh as they sing of the poison kiss which shall be Tormentilla's doom. They resolve to disguise themselves as journalists to get closer to her.

Spoken dialogue

Gallanthus enters, hidden behind yet another bunch of flowers. He kisses Angelica and says that Amaryllus wants to visit Tormentilla. Angelica, remembering the poison kiss, resists.

18. Duet (Angelica and Gallanthus)

Another beguiling duet as Angelica sings:

It does not appear to you to be clear
That my lady is fashion's new craze,

Moderato (♩ = 60)

ANGELICA

It does not appear to you to be clear That my lady is fashion's new craze, —

The time varies between the 6/8 of the above example to a more strident 2/4 as they read letters to Tormentilla from ardent suitors.

Spoken dialogue

Angelica explains to Gallanthus that if Tormentilla kisses Amaryllus he will die. This is why she won't see him any more. The Empress's mediums now enter carrying a box of poisoned chocolates from the Empress. It is their first appearance for which Vaughan Williams provides a colourful trio . . .

19. Trio (Mediums)

The music is mock-alluring, marked *andante doloroso*. It bears some resemblance to the dance of Job's comforters from *Job*, being composed at the same time as *The Poisoned Kiss*. The use of the cor anglais at the words:

If you want to escape from the tedium

is particularly appealing. The Mediums exit ('evanesce' in Sharp's original dialogue) passing the hobgoblins disguised as journalists who are making a start on their magical plot to have Tormentilla deliver the poisoned kiss to Amaryllus.

20. Entrance of Tormentilla (Chorus)

After a tenor and horn fanfare, the male chorus, offstage, sing longingly for Tormentilla. They cry out: 'Tormentilla, let us see you, Tormentilla, we adore you'. Tormentilla shrinks from them, sadly, feeling she will die of lonely constancy.

21. Song and Duet (Tormentilla and Angelica)

Tormentilla's song 'There was a time' is wistful and sentimental:

There was a time when like a child I made lament
Because today refused to stay until tomorrow;

It leads to a lovely duet with Angelica:

Wearily I go to rest,
Weary – weary – wearily!

This recalls the lullaby to the snake in Act I.

The hobgoblins enter as Angelica puts out the light. They attract Amaryllus to meet his fate . . .

22. Ensemble (Angelica, Amaryllus, Hob, Gob, Lob)

Amaryllus enters, following a strange mysterious voice:

But lovers need no bidding
When obedience fits their choice.

The magic chorus calls out to Amaryllus: 'Win her, woo her, kiss her, kiss her!' Amaryllus replies:

Voices fill the enchanted air,
Visions mock me everywhere,

The hobgoblins appear to be successful in carrying out their master's plan.

23. Serenade (Amaryllus)

Amaryllus then sings a lyrical serenade which is quite beautiful. The neglect of such music is shameful!

Dear love, behold for good or ill
How near your lover stands;
The night is ours, all sounds are still,

The third verse is even more captivating with a change of key. The orchestration is highly romantic.

The Poisoned Kiss

Amaryllus: s. Be- lov - - ed, now - at last so - near, Break down those bolts and bars! Be-

23a. Duet (Tormentilla and Amaryllus)

Tormentilla enters without seeing Amaryllus:

Sleeping or waking, my heart it is breaking,
Waking or sleeping, my heart I am keeping.
For the lover I may not wed

Amaryllus steps out. Tormentilla says 'You must not kiss me . . . Although I love forever. If you kiss me, you must die'.

24. Ensemble (Tormentilla, Amaryllus, Hob, Gob, Lob)

Tormentilla is so very tempted to kiss the man she still thinks is a goatherd. She tries, meekly, to push Amaryllus away. The music is alluring, enchanting, for 'voices fill the enchanted air'. As the hobgoblins intone their spell of doom, the music reaches its climax when Amaryllus sings:

Long have I waited, Tormentilla,
Thus to enfold you;
Men do as they are fated,
And for this one hour I've waited,
Tormentilla, thus, thus to hold you.

This is a wonderfully passionate love duet, reminiscent of Hugh and Mary's duets in Act I of *Hugh the Drover* or Anne and Fenton's aria 'See the chariot at hand here of love' in Act III of *Sir John in Love*. Resolution dies and the lovers kiss. The hobgoblins rush forward singing 'The Deed is done! The kiss, the kiss, the poison kiss!'

25. Finale

Amaryllus gradually becomes unconscious. Tormentilla, aware of what she has done, sings a tragic *adagio*:

Too dark for me has been my fate,
Too dark my fate,
Great heavens come and hide me!
Ah, cruel fate, thus to deride me!

Amaryllus raises himself to bid his lover farewell whilst Angelica, Gallanthus and the hobgoblins all sing of the sad fate of the lovers.

With this poignant finale to Act II, all comic opera pretensions have gone, swept aside by Vaughan Williams's enchanted and passionate music.

Act III

26. Introduction

Act III opens with a gracious waltz, as if Vaughan Williams is reminding everyone (including himself) that this is a comic opera. Indeed, Vaughan Williams's use of dance tunes in the third act is both entertaining and appropriate.

27. Trio (Mediums)

The waltz leads straight into an amusing po-faced tango for the three mediums:

Behold our mystic exercises,
Cabalistic, mediumistic

Tempo di Tango (molto moderato) 4/4
3 MEDIUMS (unis)
1. Be- hold our mys- - tic
2. It's true a me - - dium

ax-er-ci-see, Ca-ba-lis-tic, me-dium-is-tic:
who as-tute is, Ca-ba-lis-tic, me-dium-is-tic:

27a. Entry of Empress (Spoken dialogue)

The Empress Persicaria enters the opera with a dialogue with her physicians about the health of Amaryllus. It seems he is not dead but dying of a broken heart (in the first edition it was 'cardiac affection'). The Empress consults her crystal and sees the face of Dipsacus!

28. Ensemble (Empress and Mediums)

Monstrous vision! sings the Empress in an agitated allegro:

Whence, O whence
Comes this picture of my lover?
Who dares thus my past uncover?

The Empress declares to Dipsacus's image: 'Your magic I defy!'

29. Ballad (Empress)

A sentimental ballad follows, 'When I was young', as the Empress recounts her affair 20 years ago with Dipsacus. It shows a romantic side of Persicaria:

They took my love from me by stealth,
They swore that he sought me because of my wealth,

30. Ensemble (Empress and Mediums)

Another waltz follows, as the Empress dismisses her Mediums.

Spoken dialogue

The Empress remains unaware of Dipsacus's plot. She decides to call for Tormentilla to find out what is going on. Tormentilla arrives disorientated, to discover that the Empress is Amaryllus's mother. Tormentilla says, bravely, that she killed Amaryllus with a kiss. She reveals the story of how she was fed on poisons, and why.

The Empress tells Tormentilla her son is alive, as he had been brought up on antidotes for the Empress had suspected such a plot. But while the Empress hopes the affair is over, Tormentilla insists 'how can he live, without his lover?' The Empress softens . . .

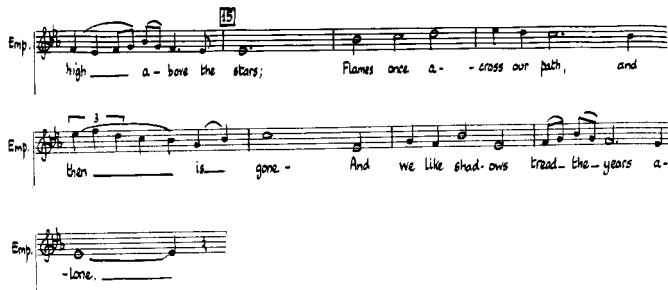
31. Duet (Tormentilla and Empress)

A wonderful, life-enhancing, big romantic song, as the Empress sings:

Love breaks all rules and spoils our little game
Enthrones the humble, scorning rank and fame;

Her last lines of the verse refer to love that:

Flames once across our path, and then is gone
And we like shadows tread the years alone



Emp
high a-bove the stars; Flames once a-cross our path, and
then is gone - And we like shadows tread the years a-
lone.

This is deeply moving, with impressive lyrics from Evelyn Sharp. Amaryllus and Tormentilla embrace.

32. Invocation

The Empress now invokes Dipsacus to her side, using imps and demons, gods and elves. They obey and Dipsacus appears, still believing Amaryllus is dead.

The Empress adds (spoken):

*Perhaps and possibly he might have died
but I know spells protective: I relied
on sense, good manners and on antibiotics
things forgotten by all of you neurotics ...*

33. Ensemble (Tormentilla, Empress, Amaryllus and Dipsacus)

To convince Dipsacus that Amaryllus is not dead, the Empress conjures up a vision, bathed in golden light, of Tormentilla and Amaryllus gazing into each other's eyes:

Come, o gentle powers of light,
Reveal the present!

There is a distorted quality of the opening music in this ensemble which suggests the working of magic. However Tormentilla and Amaryllus take us back to the romantic ardour of Act II:

How lovely is your adorable kiss!
And the look in your eyes
So gentle and wise
Like a lantern lights my soul.

Dipsacus is defeated: he accepts the lovers are proof against magical powers.

34. Duet (Empress and Dipsacus)

An overtly sentimental duet, as the Empress begins:

Can you, can you remember
The days when first we met?
The games we played,
The love we made,
When first we met

With the parents reconciled, they propose to marry and Tormentilla and Amaryllus are given their permission to wed as well.

35. Quartet (Tormentilla, Empress, Amaryllus and Dipsacus)

A patter song, to rather weak lyrics:

(All) Love in a hut,
Is picturesque, but,
(Amaryllus) I owe it's disaster
Unless you've been wise.
(Tormentilla) Insist on good heating.
And adequate neatening etc.

36. Sextet (3 Mediums, Hob, Gob, Lob)

Despite initial protestations (Horrid monster, hence away!) the three hobgoblins pair off with the three Mediums. A generous warm-hearted melody softens the Mediums. They kiss, and sink as couples in three separate seats, to renounce magic and live true 'suburban lives'.

37. Duet (Gallanthus and Angelica)

Only Gallanthus and Angelica remain to state their desire to wed. In a catchy and humorous duet, they confirm that marriage is the proper, proper, proper thing to do. A dance between the two lovers is a delightful moment.



Ang.
Gall.
That's the proper pro-per pro-per thing to do!
That's the proper pro-per pro-per thing to do!
DANCE
ANGELICA and GALLANTHUS retire to a corner so that they are not seen by the MEDIUMS and HOBGOBLINS

38. Finale (All principals and chorus)

A hornpipe, with trumpeters and drummers, leads into the uplifting finale:

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

'Six more victims of the passion' shows a certain sardonic quality even in this moment of optimism and happiness.

And they all lived happily ever after.

Uncle Ralph, Uncle Wiz and Benji

by Jeffrey Aldridge

Donald Mitchell, in his edition of Benjamin Britten's *Letters and Diaries*, has this to say about the relationship between Britten and Vaughan Williams:- "Britten's relationship with Vaughan Williams (and to his music) was never an easy one. He had no great enthusiasm for his senior's works and remembered what he took to be a generally unsympathetic attitude on Vaughan Williams's part during his student years...It was probably on the occasion of the 1931 award of the Farrar Composition Prize that Vaughan Williams is said by one source to have remarked, 'Very clever but beastly music'. We cannot be absolutely sure of the occasion but the comment itself is well attested; whether it was Vaughan Williams's or another's, there can be little doubt that it rather accurately reflected the kind of testy, disbelieving, dismissive impatience that was all too often the stock reaction to the student Britten's gifts.

Not just to the student Britten - I can remember similar reactions to Britten's music being made in the 1960s. It is well known that Britten had a very thin skin and did not take kindly to adverse comment (or almost any comment with which he did not agree). Consequently, anything that he took to be a slight was not easily dismissed; his career is littered with the discarded bodies of those who upset him in some way. There is no reason to suppose that he did not feel similarly slighted by some remark attributed to Vaughan Williams. There was, in addition, his attitude towards his whole experience at the Royal College of Music: "I feel I didn't learn very much...Not nearly enough account was taken of the exceptionally gifted musician. When you are immensely full of energy and ideas you don't want to waste your time being taken through elementary exercises in dictation." This is understandable; I seem to remember Beethoven having a similar attitude towards his lessons with Haydn. Of course, that didn't stop Beethoven having the greatest admiration, even reverence, for Haydn. There is something in what Britten says but it is not unique. Turn it round and look at it from the teacher's point of view and something like it has struck almost everyone in the education world at some time or other: what am I to do with this pupil who knows as much or more than I do? We might think it more than a trifle arrogant on Britten's part to describe himself as "exceptionally gifted", even if it is true. We know that Vaughan Williams's attitude to his own achievements was very different; he was self-deprecating and understated about himself and his work. Everything about VW's upbringing would have suggested that a proper modesty was the thing: I suspect that there was a hint of bad form about being too sure of oneself. The trouble with this, of course, is that others might take such modesty as the reality and believe that VW really was rather amateurish and not very good. And here he is, this bumbling, well-intentioned but hopelessly inept person teaching the brilliant prodigy, and not only inept etc, but possessed of attitudes that are positively hostile to the artistic efforts of the young genius: "very clever but beastly music".

That said, it is important to consider all the evidence (rather than hearsay) we have concerning VW's attitude to the young Britten, since the elder composer was not one so cavalierly to dismiss a younger composer's efforts. Was Britten right, in other words, to consider Vaughan Williams to be "generally unsympathetic"? As Donald Mitchell goes on to say in this same note that I refer to above: "Vaughan Williams, in any event, was to show a generous, sympathetic and, one might think, altogether more characteristic attitude with regard to Britten's early *Psalms*, of which he tried (unsuccessfully) to secure a performance." Just a few pages further on in this same volume of Britten's letters appears a facsimile of The Royal College terminal report, Midsummer Term 1931, signed by Sir Hugh Allen, which includes this handwritten comment: "I hear the best news of him from V.W." Two pages later in this volume there is a letter from Sir Hugh to Britten's mother: "Dear Mrs Britten, I was delighted to hear from Vaughan Williams who examined at the end of the term for the Composition how highly he thought of your boy's work."

In the light of this last paragraph, and of everything we know about RVW, it seems absurd to link Vaughan Williams's name with a remark that "rather accurately reflected the kind of testy, disbelieving, dismissive" attitude prevalent among a certain sector of the musical world. It is, unfortunately, rather more typical of Britten that he would remember the supposed slight rather than the acts of generosity and encouragement.

If we go on a few years to the famous concert which launched VW's *Five Tudor Portraits* and Britten's *Our Hunting Fathers* on to an unsuspecting world, there are more clues to Britten's uneasy relationship with RVW, and clues which, I suggest, say more about Britten than about Vaughan Williams. The rehearsal a week before the premiere was something of an event. Here is what Britten wrote (I keep his idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation):

"Waiting till 8.30 to begin the rehearsal of *Our Hunting Fathers* - the orchestra (fourth day of 9 hours rehearsal) is at the end of it's tether - no discipline at all - no one there to enforce it. I get thoroughly het up & disparate - can't hear a thing in the wretched Foyer. I get alot of the speeds wrong & very muddled - but I'm glad to say that in spite of the fooling in the orchestra and titters at the work - the 'Rats' especially brought shrieks of laughter - the rehearsal got better and better."

A footnote by Mitchell points out that "This notoriously turbulent rehearsal was attended by Vaughan Williams, who, according to Sophie Wyss (who was singing the solo part), reproved the orchestra, whereupon 'they pulled themselves together and gave a fair performance'." It seems a pity that Britten can't bring himself to mention this, even in his diary, just confining himself to "the rehearsal got better and better". His report of the concert mentions that "V.Williams conducts a very successful show of his *5 Tudor Portraits* (1st perf.) - not my music, but obviously the music for the audience." Except, that is, for the Countess of Albemarle who walked out, declaring the work 'disgusting' (though that was almost certainly aimed at the words rather than the music).

I quote Britten's diary here ('not my music') since I am not sure of the absolute truth of his statement. Of course, there is no blame attached to not liking VW's music (or anybody else's) if one is simply diametrically opposed to it, but I am not sure that Britten was, certainly not to the extent that he insisted he was. Of course, young people of talent often feel a need to turn against that which came just before them, even to reject it out of hand in order to establish their own independence. Britten's diary entry for 28th July 1936 reinforces this: "Lennox (Berkeley) has brought with him scores of the new Walton (B flat) and Vaughan Williams (F minor) symphonies & we spend the most hysterical evenings pulling them to pieces - the amateurishness and clumsiness of the Williams - the "gitters" (jitters) of the fate-ridden Walton - & the over pretentiousness of them both - & abominable scoring. The directions in the score too are most mirth condusive! It isn't that one is cruel about their works which are naturally better than a tremendous amount of English music - but it is only so much is pretended of them, & they are compared to the great Beethoven, Mozart, Mahler symphonies."

After a contemptuously dismissive statement like that, why do I suggest that Britten wasn't as opposed to the music of Vaughan Williams as he says he was? We have his own statements that in his earlier years he greatly admired the *Tallis Fantasia* and that, as a member of a choir, he sang in the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, under the composer's baton, and thought the music very beautiful. As he grew older, his musical tastes could well have changed - which of us has not undergone such a change? - but I think it is interesting to consider how *similar* some of Britten's music is to that of Vaughan Williams. Take that piece by VW which Britten describes in his diary as "not my music", the *Five Tudor Portraits*. Look at this extract from the first movement of VW's work:



What we see (and hear, of course) is a generally downward-moving motif, tumbling over itself in close canon and followed by a series of thumps. Less than a decade later, in *Peter Grimes*, we find this, very similar, sequence:



While we are citing *Peter Grimes*, it is worth remembering this aria by Ellen:



Compare that, written in the mid-1940s, with this, sung by Mary in *Hugh the Drover* (of all things; you wouldn't expect Benji to take anything from such a folksy piece as this, would you? Maybe it isn't as 'folksy' as all that.):



Not his music, eh?

Furthermore, in these *Portraits*, Vaughan Williams not only anticipates the lusty anticlericalism of Orff's *Carmina Burana* (listen to the third movement's rowdy male-voice mock Latin), but in his last movement (Jolly Rutterkin) makes very similar noises to those made by Britten some twelve years later in the last movement of his *Spring Symphony*. Both are sixteenth-century pieces of 'popular' verse which celebrate having a good time in town and describe in some detail a dandified swaggerer, but there is more to it than that, I think. It seems to me that in places there is a similar sound world (particularly in the fast passages and final section of the Britten) as well as a similarity of mood, though VW's is the more adventurous rhythmically. The similarities of text produce a not-dissimilar response from the two composers. If I am right in this assertion, what price VW's 'abominable scoring'?

While on the subject of his scoring, there is a wonderful passage in the longest of the *Portraits*, the Lament for Philip Sparrow, which describes purely musically a gathering of birds at poor Philip's funeral. In its rich but delicate depiction of a multiplicity of birdsong, and throughout the following section which includes variations on the *Dies Irae*, it eclipses Britten's attempts at something similar in the first movement of the *Spring Symphony* (jug-jug, puwee, towhitawhoo, cuckoo) and in the nocturnal interlude in *The Little Sweep*. I admire these two last pieces, but don't tell me that they display a greater skill than Vaughan Williams's episode; in fact, they are pretty small beer compared with it. Indeed, the

only piece of 'birdsong' music that comes to the level of VW's is, it seems to me, Ravel's wonderful night picture (owl, nightingale plus frogs) in *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* - I can't yet get over-enthusiastic about Messiaen's birdsongs.

Much of what Britten writes about the *F minor Symphony* in the diary entry quoted above can be put down to a young man's reaction, no doubt (though it is interesting to note that the 'amateurish' gibe against Vaughan Williams has had as long a shelf life as the 'too clever' gibe against Britten). To be fair to VW and Walton, I don't think they made comparisons between their work and that of Beethoven, Mozart or Mahler; they cannot be blamed for the judgments of others. However, it ill behoves anyone (however clever) simply to dismiss the opinions of those with whom one disagrees. If someone (Ursula Vaughan Williams - and she should know - suggests William Walton but I have seen a different reference to Constant Lambert, though the important point here is that neither was a particular VW fan) reckoned Vaughan Williams's *Fourth* was the greatest symphony since Beethoven, the work in question might be worth a little consideration: indeed, it might be thought that there could be something to it, despite its 'amateurishness' and 'clumsiness'. Then there is the question of the 'abominable' scoring. This is the first time I have seen such an accusation delivered against Walton, though it often is against Vaughan Williams, of course. What would be good to know is, given the notes of the *Fourth Symphony*, in what ways Britten would have changed the scoring, and how the resulting work would have sounded. Somebody as brilliant as Britten should be able to understand that VW might have wanted the piece to sound as it does, heavy scoring and all. After all, if he wanted to orchestrate with brilliance and finesse, he could do it: consider the final section of the third movement of the *Pastoral Symphony* (and find me anything in Britten's canon that is as delicate). And we should remember Vaughan Williams's famous remark about the *Fourth Symphony*: "I don't know if I like it, but it is what I meant." It is worth repeating: it is what he meant. So maybe the scoring is not as abominable as Britten thought, nor the amateurishness. After all, VW wasn't averse to tinkering with a piece (remember the *London Symphony*) but the *Fourth* he left alone (except for one note at the end of the second movement). Again, it is worth recalling that he had been a pupil of that nonpareil among orchestrators, Maurice Ravel, who retained a lifelong friendship with, and admiration for, RVW. It is time that this gibe against Vaughan Williams was put to rest.

As I said above, we know about Britten's sensitivity, his thin skin. There may be good reasons for this, of course. Certainly there were many less gifted people who were dismissive of his work, accusing it of mere cleverness; that must be galling for someone who knows that he is much more musically gifted than they are. Then there was the matter of his homosexuality, which upset some (and was, of course, regarded as criminal in Britain until the 1960s); this was made worse by an implied tendency towards paedophilia. Insofar as Britten recognised such a tendency within himself, it is clear that he controlled it - in that regard, I believe he should be respected rather than condemned. (David Hemmings has an interesting anecdote in this regard.) There is also the fact that this admiration for young boys was a major factor in leading him to compose so much memorable music for children.

He did not appreciate jokes against himself, certainly. Walton often had little digs against his and Peter Pears's homosexuality, which (as Susana Walton writes) were not found amusing. Similarly, Britten probably did not appreciate VW's little joke at his expense which Michael Kennedy refers to: "...Britten went into the room for his examination with a bundle of compositions under his arm. 'Is that all?' Vaughan Williams asked, with a twinkle. Britten blinked and replied: 'Oh no, I've got two suitcases full outside.'" I bet he had too.

Britten's mother's influence on him was almost certainly another factor to consider. Edith Britten's youngest, and favourite, child displayed prodigious musical gifts from a very early age and she was determined, as she said, that he should become a great musician, the fourth 'B', after Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. This is a big ambition, even for a doting mother, yet the evidence suggests that she meant it. The fact that the infant Britten's earliest jottings about school and family have been

carefully preserved points in this direction. (Were similar collections made of the early letters of his siblings?) Her death, when Britten was only 23, must have had a profound effect. It is significant that shortly afterwards he began the friendship, which became a lifetime's love, with Peter Pears: a friend "significantly noted that Pears's singing voice was 'fantastically similar to that of Mrs Britten.'" (Michael Kennedy: *Britten* 1981, 1993) There is no doubt that, throughout his childhood and adolescence, Britten was the most cosseted member of the family, the focus of hopes and ambitions, the centre of attraction. After the deaths of his parents, there is also no doubt that conditions were created which replicated this family atmosphere. Britten is always seen as part of a group, whether it be the late 1930s Auden set and those involved with the GPO Film Unit, or the Mayers in Amity, then Auden again in New York, or, of course, the whole Aldeburgh set-up for the last thirty years or so of his life; Peter Pears was the constant factor, of course. Always, Britten was the central musical figure, increasingly (until his illness-blighted final years) the central figure in every respect.

It was Auden himself who recognised this need in Britten to be the centre of attention. The now-famous letter that he wrote to Britten in 1942 sums up much of this side of the composer's character :

Dearest Ben,

Very guilty about not having written. Perhaps I can't make myself believe that you are really leaving us. I need scarcely say, my dear, how much I shall miss you and Peter; or how much I love you both.

There is a lot I want to talk to you about, but I must try and say a little of it by letter. I have been thinking a great deal about you and your work during the past year. As you know I think you the white hope of music; for this very reason I am more critical of you than of anybody else, and I think you know something about the dangers that beset you as a man and as an artist because they are my own.

Goodness and (Beauty) are the results of a perfect balance between Order and Chaos, Bohemianism and Bourgeois Convention.

Bohemian Chaos alone ends in a mad jumble of beautiful scraps; Bourgeois convention alone ends in large unfeeling corpses.....

For middle-class Englishmen like you and me, the danger is of course the second. Your attraction to thin-as-a-board juveniles, ie to the sexless and innocent, is a symptom of this. And I am certain too that it is your denial and evasion of the demands of disorder that is responsible for your attacks of ill-health, ie sickness is your substitute for the Bohemian.

Wherever you go you are and probably always will be surrounded by people who adore you, nurse you, and praise everything you do, eg Elisabeth (Mayer), Peter... Up to a certain point this is fine for you, but beware. You see, Bengy dear, you are always tempted to make things too easy for yourself in this way, ie to build yourself a warm nest of love (of course when you get it, you find it a little stifling) by playing the lovable, talented little boy.

If you are really to develop to your full stature, you will have, I think, to suffer, and make others suffer, in ways which are totally strange to you at present, and against every conscious value that you have; ie you will have to be able to say what you never have had the right to say - God, I'm a shit.....

*All my love to you both, and God bless you
Wystan*

The remarkable thing for me about this letter is its perception. In 1942, Britten was still under thirty; all those studies of thin-as-a-board juveniles, sexless and innocent, and of the loss of innocence (in *Peter Grimes*, *Albert Herring*, *The Little Sweep*, *Billy Budd*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Curlew River*, *The Prodigal Son*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Death in Venice*, *Saint Nicholas*, *The Golden Vanity*, *Children's Crusade*) are all in the future, yet Auden has already pinpointed an obsession. There are other features of the letter which say more about Auden than Britten: the equation of ill-health with the avoidance of what he calls the "demands of disorder" (but then Auden was notoriously disordered and slovenly in his private life, whereas Britten was fastidious to a fault). This does not, however, entirely dismiss the idea that some of Britten's ill-health at the time was what we would now call 'psychosomatic'. The fact that Auden had a tendency to lecture his friends about their failings as well as their

strengths does not mean that he was wrong. If there is truth in this letter, to what extent did Britten manage to overcome the dangers that Auden foresees?

That Britten is a great composer I have no doubt; he has left us a legacy as enduring as any. More than many, however, his complex personality is reflected in much of his work, no doubt because so much of it is dramatic, the songs and choral pieces as well as the operas. I am thinking in this essay, though, about his relationship towards the work of Ralph Vaughan Williams, and I believe that what is written in his early diaries does not reflect his attitude as he matured, and, paradoxically, became more independent of those profound early influences of family and mentors like Auden. Certainly, the letter that Britten wrote to Ursula Vaughan Williams after RVW's death is very different in tone from that diary entry of some twenty years earlier:

Dear Mrs Vaughan Williams,

I should like to send my deepest sympathy to you on the death of your husband, a very great man. He has been such a tremendous figure to me, all my musical life, that it is hard to realize he is no longer with us. We will miss him sadly - above all his wonderful, uncompromising courage in fighting for all those things he believed in - things which I personally believe to be some of the most important in life. You have the warmest thoughts of the countless people who loved him with you at this terrible moment.

*Yours sincerely,
Benjamin Britten*

The acknowledgment of Vaughan Williams as a 'tremendous figure' throughout his life strikes a very different note but does beg a question: in what way, exactly, was the elder man such a 'tremendous figure'? Once again we need to look at some comparisons.

We all know the huge importance of Vaughan Williams's role in the preservation and promulgation of English folksong. Britten was too young to be involved in the collection of folksong but he set many of them. I have no doubt that the nature of many of his settings is deliberately different from (as a reaction against?) those of Vaughan Williams. He expressed a preference for Percy Grainger's settings. It seems clear to me that the three composers were engaged on different kinds of exercise, using folksong for different purposes. Of the three, Vaughan Williams was the nearest (most of the time) to presenting the songs simply and plainly; Britten was the nearest (most of the time) to wanting a kind of 'art song'; Grainger I can only place in a category of his own. I love many of the folksong works of all three, but I accept that VW can sometimes be pretty perfunctory in his settings, while Britten can be perversely arty (Sweet Polly Oliver, for example). Grainger at his best (*Shallow Brown*) is uniquely, quirkily, brilliantly original; Britten at his best (*Waly Waly*) achieves that profound simplicity that is the province of the greatest art.

Britten is sometimes credited with originating (in English anyway) the 'anthology' work, using words from different sources to create a single musical work: *The Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* and *The Nocturne*, the *Spring Symphony* and the *War Requiem*. But Vaughan Williams, in the 1930s, had produced *Dona Nobis Pacem*, setting words from Walt Whitman (three different poems) alongside John Bright and several passages from the Bible (Jeremiah, Daniel, Haggai, Micah, Leviticus, Psalms, Isaiah and the Gospel of St Luke), the *Agnus Dei* from the Ordinary of the Mass, and its final words, the title of the work, which recur throughout. The musical model for this work could be considered to be Verdi's *Requiem*, a major influence, too, on Britten's *War Requiem*. The sharing of text makes the obvious comparisons between Britten's and Verdi's settings more easy, but (with a sidelong glance at the Italian) I would like to make comparisons between Britten and VW.

Taking their cue, no doubt, from Verdi (though not forgetting Berlioz's sound and fury) both composers use fanfares at appropriate moments (in both cases, to introduce their second movements). *Dona Nobis Pacem*, being a non-liturgical work despite the presence of the *Agnus Dei*, uses

Whitman's poetry, rather than the *Dies Irae*, at this point, but the musical message from the brass is similar (indeed, remarkably similar) to Britten's work of a quarter of a century later, VW's upward leap of a fifth, followed by a figure using repeated triplets providing a remarkable pre-echo of Britten's opening fanfares (though he, with his fondness for arpeggio figures puts the third in the middle of the leap of a fifth):



Britten's fanfares for this movement include this downward-moving figure for trombone:



This is not dissimilar to this figure from *Dona Nobis Pacem* which comes shortly after VW's opening fanfares:



Michael Kennedy points out a similarity between VW's following movement, *Reconciliation*, with Britten's setting of Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting' in the last movement of the *War Requiem*. It is a similarity of mood brought about through the similarity of texts, both Owen's and Whitman's poems telling of encounters with dead enemies (in the Owen poem the protagonist is dead too, of course) and both appealing for reconciliation and an end to conflict. That last movement of the *War Requiem* contains more than Owen's poem, of course, the first part being taken up with the *Libera Me*, sung to a slow march introduced by percussion :



This bears a striking resemblance to the opening of the setting of *Dirge* for Two Veterans, the central movement of *Dona Nobis Pacem* and itself a huge slow march:



Significantly, after the percussive openings, both composers use unison woodwind, with Britten adding a flute to the clarinet and bassoon used by Vaughan Williams. So in perhaps his most famous work, a work Shostakovich described as the greatest work of the twentieth century, we find Britten producing music that is strikingly similar to that which Vaughan Williams had written a quarter of a century earlier.

Britten deliberately used traditional models for his setting of the *Requiem Mass*; by these means the contrast with the poems of Owen could be more clearly drawn. It is, nevertheless, interesting that in doing this he sometimes creates a musical world not so far from that of Vaughan Williams, another composer who valued tradition. Towards the very end of the *War Requiem*, at that marvellous moment when all the huge forces that have been employed are brought together, the chamber orchestra plays this :



I know who that sounds like to me, and it is none the worse for that. Whether Benji would have accepted that it sounds like Uncle Ralph, I'm not so sure. Clearly, though, *Dona Nobis Pacem* occupied a position in the 1930s similar to that of the *War Requiem* in the 1960s. I would have thought that, even with his general antipathy to VW's music, Britten would have seen the power and relevance of the earlier work, especially as it reflected in many ways his own views. Am I going too far to suggest that, maybe unconsciously, in the opening of the *Dies Irae*, the opening of the *Libera Me* and in those few bars quoted immediately above, there is a tribute to his predecessor? VW was, in his own words, "a very great man" who held firm to his principles; maybe the older and wiser Britten, while not altering his musical opinions totally, discovered in a parallel work a sympathy that he had not found before.

The Pilgrim's Progress in context: A preliminary study

by Eric Seddon

From the time of its premiere at Covent Garden on 26 April 1951, Ralph Vaughan Williams's operatic masterpiece, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, has been at the very least enigmatic for those who would seek to understand, categorize, support or criticize it. One of the first points of contention usually raised is the question of its suitability for the operatic stage. Its critics point to what they consider to be the static nature of the action, often described as independent tableaux rather than scenes flowing one from another. They point further to the content of those tableaux, suggesting that such noble, religious sentiment ought to be performed in cathedrals rather than opera houses. Finally, they point to the fact that the composer himself referred to the piece as a 'Morality' rather than as an 'opera.' All of these arguments tend to put the supporters of the piece on the defensive from the outset. One feels that, as a musicologist, one must deliver an apology for the piece rather than focus on its unique qualities.

Indeed, to discuss how unique the work is seems dangerous, as it might further alienate the piece from a potential staging. To compound the problem, those of us who recognize the piece's dramatic qualities, who actually find in it a supremely dramatic statement, often find ourselves in the most difficult of positions: trying to prove what to us seems self-evident. The temptation even exists to get a bit frustrated with RVW himself for having named the piece a 'Morality.' It begins to seem that if he had just named it an 'opera' in the first place, he'd have saved us all a lot of trouble in trying to get it staged.

This temptation, though, is better off ignored. The fact is that in designating the piece a 'Morality,' the composer was illuminating the sub-genre of the piece rather than obscuring it, and that such a designation does not at all separate it from the general canon of operatic

compositions. Thus, instead of defending the piece by a discussion, primarily, of its interior virtues in an isolated fashion, this article aims to do something slightly different: to place *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the context of Vaughan Williams's thought and in the context of the 20th century, and to compare and contrast the opera's achievement with its most similar contemporaries. Two other composers' operas in particular, produced in the same decade, will help to illuminate the unique but necessarily operatic place in musical history *The Pilgrim's Progress* occupies.

During the 1950's three major composers, none of them particularly known for operatic endeavors, each produced masterpieces for the stage. In September of 1951 Igor Stravinsky, who had long wanted to write an English language opera, produced *The Rake's Progress*, an opera in the form of a "moral fable" based upon Hogarth's 18th century paintings, with text by W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman. Earlier in the same year, as part of the Festival of Britain, Ralph Vaughan Williams produced the results of four and a half decades of work when *The Pilgrim's Progress* was staged at Covent Garden. The third of this interesting operatic triptych, Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, was produced in Milan's famed La Scala in 1957. It was based on the true story of the execution of 16 Carmelite nuns during the French Revolution.

These three operas have many interesting things in common. First, they each represent the undeniable apotheosis for their respective composers in the operatic form. Second, they were all staged after World War II, with only one of them being conceived prior to the war (Vaughan Williams had conceived of a Bunyan-based opera prior to even WWI, let alone WWII). Third, each of them dealt with morality on one level or another, while struggling with the questions of good and evil. It is also important to note that all three of them were written in an accessible, tonal, musical language.

The fact that they were all written or produced in the decade following World War II is, I think, not necessarily as insignificant or coincidental as it might seem. While much has rightfully been said about the impact of World War I upon the history of music, comparatively little has been made by musical historians concerning the aftermath of the Second World War. Perhaps this is because the major composers between the two wars were essentially the major composers from before the First World War as well, making the study of the war's effects more blatant and discernible. Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Vaughan Williams, and Ravel, among others, were all well established before the war as important composers, thus any deliberate or noticeable changes in style immediately after the war were likely to be scrutinized and easily quantified. Stravinsky's move to neoclassicism and Schoenberg's codifying of his serial method are perhaps the best known and most aurally identifiable differences between their old and new styles, but the change in Vaughan Williams's style is noticeable as well, particularly as the release of Richard Hickox's recording of the *London Symphony* provides us with an opportunity to look into the difference between the pre-war and the post-war RVW. Gone are the romantic meanderings, the chromatic ambiguities of his older style. The new is marked by a greater clarity, stronger musical direction, and more attention to definite moments of climax and release. Whether the war had any direct impact upon this change, or whether RVW was moving in this direction anyway might be a subject for debate, but it is interesting to note that his *Pastoral Symphony*, directly related to his wartime experience, exhibits all of the attention to clarity and climax just mentioned as aspects of his post-war style. The dramatic shift from the "Romantic" to the "Modern" had taken place. Not long afterwards, in an article about Holst, Vaughan Williams himself was to describe the "essence of modern music" as "to drive straight at the root of the matter in hand without artifice or subterfuge" (*National Music* p.139). Although this same attitude might even be argued in the younger VW's pieces, I think it is finally and fully realized after the war.

Less is made of the post WWII era, perhaps because the prominent composers before the war were not necessarily the most prominent afterwards. John Cage, Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, Michael Tippett and others, though most of whom were active before the war (some for a considerable amount of time) gained their greatest fame afterwards, and

little attention has been given to their pre-war styles. Meanwhile, composers such as Aaron Copland and even Stravinsky himself spent their final decades writing twelve-tone music, most of which isn't performed today. In a sense they composed themselves into historical obscurity at a time when they might have been writing their most enduring works (an irony Stravinsky would have found maddening). But another thing had also happened: the enthusiastic young composers of the first half of the century had become the old guard. Vaughan Williams, though respectfully regarded as the Grand Old Man of British music in the post WWII period, had become critically marginalized in favor of the younger Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett. Stravinsky was no longer considered the revolutionary he was once hailed as, and Poulenc was simply regarded as one of the only members of "Les Six" who hadn't dropped entirely off the musical map. Critics were looking in other places. Schoenberg's nearly two decades of teaching in southern California had exercised a tremendous influence on an entire generation of American composers and scholars, making serialism the dominant compositional method in both Europe and North America among conservatory-trained composers until probably the early 1980's. It is telling to note, however, that no other serial composers past the first generation of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, have even come close to entering the standard repertoire. Thus the post WWII musical landscape is even more drastically different from the 1930s than the post WWI era is from pre-1914.

I am not sure whether or not WWII had a specific impact on the history of music that can as yet be definitely traced, but we are just now getting to be far enough away from that era to see things more clearly in their historical context. Certainly music history was radically changed at that time, though whether the war created or facilitated that change may be debatable. One of the most fascinating things that I've noticed in studying this period is that the great orchestral canon seems actually to have all but completely closed shortly after the war. Until then, pieces were still regularly added to the repertoire, right up until the end of the war. Shostakovich's *7th symphony*, Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra*, Prokofiev's *5th Symphony*, Vaughan Williams's *5th*: all of these are wartime pieces and all have remained in the repertoire, but almost immediately afterwards the crop begins to die off, and by the 1960's hardly any pieces are introduced that have remained in the standard repertoire to the present day (one of the last indisputable additions to the canon is Britten's *War Requiem*). This is not to comment at all on the relative merits of any of the pieces since that time (I think MacMillan's *Seven Last Words from the Cross* is a masterpiece). Rather, it is to point out that something sociological, musical, political, economic, philosophic, technological or some combination of all of these things happened to shift emphasis away from the forms, methods and standards that had dominated western art music for two hundred years or more. And this shift, even if it was only temporarily in effect for four or five decades, had a drastic effect on the orchestral and operatic repertoire, including how those repertoires are built and maintained. I bring this up here not for the sake of expounding this theory in full but to point out that in the midst of this great shift in music history, these three operas stand. They are pieces at the very end of an era not only for their composers, but possibly for the history of music itself. And particularly interesting to my current discussion is that the three of them all turned their attentions to morality and/or sacred opera.

The term of "sacred opera" may sound a bit strange, but it is by no means an alien concept to the genre. Verdi's *Nabucco*, Saint-Saens's *Samson et Delilah*, Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, and Wagner's *Parsifal*, among others, all deal with sacred subjects of one form or another. Likewise, "moralities" are quite standard in the repertoire, as evidenced by Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (which seems more a celebration of womanizing, even rape, until the moralizing ending where *Don Giovanni* is dragged down to hell), Gounod's *Faust* and even pieces such as Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. The operatic high-water mark for Stravinsky, Poulenc and Vaughan Williams happened in one or both of these sub-genres. Stravinsky's is a straight moral fable. There is little to suggest, overtly, anything sacred about the piece, and the only 'religious' elements mentioned in the libretto occur when a crowd of gossips talking about the main character, Tom Rakewell, give differing accounts of his denominational status: "He's Methodist-he's Papist-he's converting

Jewry!” None of which was apparently true. Poulenc’s *Carmelites*, by contrast, deals very little with overt morality, save in the choice of an individual young woman to either remain faithful to her vow or to renounce it, but even this isn’t the central issue of the plot. Instead, the opera focuses on the sacred—the mysteries of the spiritual life vs. the physical, of the spiritual courage and strength to face death without being overcome by fear. By contrast, Vaughan Williams’s *Pilgrim* is a merger of the two forms: it is both a morality, as the title informs us, and a sacred opera, as critics have been eager to point out (not always encouragingly). The use of sacred symbols and texts permeate the opera to a degree rarely if ever matched in the history of opera, or at least in an opera of its caliber and importance within the composer’s own canon.

Having said all of this, why would three such pieces, culminations for these composers, suddenly appear during the decade of the 1950s? Did WWII, if fact, play any role in the composition, production, or inspiration of these pieces? I think a case can be made, especially if one considers the philosophical underpinnings of at least the Poulenc and the Stravinsky, that a reaction to WWII was in the background. Stravinsky, never a composer to be shy about his musical or philosophical opinions, stated in his Harvard lectures of 1939–40 that “If we take reason alone as a guide in this field, it will lead us straight to falsehoods, since it will no longer be enlightened by instinct. Instinct is infallible” (Poetics of Music, p.25). Incidentally, this statement might have been written by Wagner, so close is it to his philosophy, a fact which would have appalled Stravinsky had it been mentioned at the time. By contrast, the Stravinsky who was busy composing the *Rake* less than a decade after giving these lectures seems to have been making the opposite philosophical point. He lampoons the foolish protagonist, Tom Rakewell, who follows “nature” and instinct into a brothel in London. Indeed, in the end, Rakewell must pay the price for his instinct-worship: he loses his reason altogether and ends up in a madhouse. If we take Stravinsky at his word in both instances, we are forced to draw the conclusion that his personal artistic philosophy, if not his philosophy of life itself, underwent a drastic change after the Second World War. One might argue that in the first case Stravinsky was discussing “art” while in the second he was discussing “life” but this surely becomes a strained dichotomy when one realizes that, for an artist, the two are generally the same endeavor.

Stravinsky, it ought to be clearly stated, was quite strongly opposed to the Wagnerian concept of art. He rejected it outright as an abomination, as the idolatry of art—the turning of art into a religion. His criticism was thorough: he rejected even the premise of Wagner’s attempted return to the music dramas of the middle ages, pointing out that those medieval works had sprung from the soil of Christian faith rather than what he conceived to be Wagner’s perverse “aping of a religious rite” (Autobiography, p. 39). Although Stravinsky tried very hard not to be labelled as either a reactionary or as a composer “of the future,” *The Rake’s Progress* most definitely betrays a reactionary spirit. In it, Stravinsky attempts to resurrect secco recitative and the standard “numbers” opera from pre-Wagnerian days. Considering the amount of Wagnerian propaganda used by the Third Reich during WWII, it is not very far fetched to think that the *Rake* was prodded on by a philosophical reaction to the war. It is also quite possible that Stravinsky had re-evaluated his notions of “instinct” found the similarities between his own thought and Wagner’s, and realized that the idolatry of instinct can lead to atrocities if unchecked by reason.

In a similar manner, it is not at all out of the question that Poulenc’s *Dialogues des Carmélites* was influenced by a similar spirit of reaction. But instead of the simplistic, if sensible, moral of the *Rake* (that reason must govern instinct), Poulenc’s criticism of society, where it exists in the opera, is against rationalism as an end in itself. The nuns in the opera are executed, quite simply, as traitors to the Republic. They are part of an organization which is governed by a foreign authority (Rome) and which was allied to the recently overthrown monarchical regime. Therefore they are to be executed as traitors if they refuse to disband. Meticulously based on a play by Georges Bernanos, a noted monarchist reactionary and, like Poulenc, a devout Roman Catholic, the opera is a vivid statement that liberty, equality, and fraternity are not enough; that if they are enforced under the control of an atheistic “enlightenment,” they will descend immediately into barbarism: the *vox populi* becoming the tyranny of the mob rather than the *vox dei*.

By contrast to the other two, Vaughan Williams is not a composer easily pinned down philosophically, and seems to have had a less drastic reaction to the war. Still, there is a reaction to be found, at least musically. In a technical sense, WWII played at least a minor role in the compositional development of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, in that RVW was asked to write incidental music for a BBC wartime radio production of Bunyan. Of course, it is more than likely that the final form of the opera would be virtually the same anyway, but the added incentive must have encouraged the project, possibly even providing a catalyst for composition of the final work at a crucial stage of development. Yet to speak of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a reaction in any way to the Second World War in the same manner that one might legitimately speculate concerning the *Rake* and the *Carmélites* would be unfounded. What can be said is that *Pilgrim* is the culmination of a period in RVW’s compositional career. Stylistically, it fits in more comfortably in a discussion of works like the *Pastoral Symphony* or even the *Dona Nobis Pacem* than it does with the 6th and 7th symphonies, let alone the 8th and 9th. It is also worth noting that after the 5th symphony, which is intimately related to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, RVW never again composed a symphony in a major key, and the last four symphonies are notably more disturbing than four of the first five (the F minor 4th excepted, for obvious reasons).

Unlike Stravinsky and Poulenc, however, Vaughan Williams’s religious beliefs are not precisely known, and the data is decidedly ambiguous. This is perhaps unfortunate, as direct knowledge of those beliefs would shed considerable light on his pieces. In particular, our understanding of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* would benefit by a discussion of these beliefs, regardless of the difficulties. In general, over the four and a half decades since RVW’s death, much has been made of his agnosticism. Recently, Dr. Byron Adams, in his influential article on RVW and his use of scripture, has suggested that the composer was a rational humanist (or at least implied that many of his statements ought to be understood in this context) (Frogley, p.108). James Day has suggested that the composer “accepted the altruism of the Christian ethic while rejecting its supernatural element”, (Day, p.100). While this may apply, in some ways, to RVW’s beliefs at certain times of his life, particularly in his very early years, I must respectfully disagree with these theories as an overall assessment of the composer’s beliefs. Furthermore, I believe a revisiting of these issues to be necessary in order to fully understand the dramatic vitality of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

First, as to whether Vaughan Williams was a rational humanist, such a notion is thrown into serious doubt, if not refuted outright, by the composer himself in a letter to Rutland Boughton regarding *The Pilgrim’s Progress*:

...as to what you accuse me of—i.e. ‘re-dressing an old theology’, it seems to me that some of your ideas are a good deal more moribund than Bunyan’s theology:—*the old fashioned* republicanism and Marxism which led direct to the appalling dictatorships of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, or your Rationalism, which dates from about 1880 and has entirely failed to solve any problems of the Universe (UVW, p.304).

Secondly, as to whether Vaughan Williams accepted the Christian ethic while denying the supernatural qualities of the religion, I think such a theory less likely when one considers a number of things. In the context of our present discussion, the *Pilgrim* itself becomes a horribly misguided and indeed a failed work of art if such a theory is applied to it. The reason is this: the charge of “static” to the drama must be considered undeniably true unless the coming of the Pilgrim to the cross at the beginning of Act I, Scene 2 isn’t charged with supernatural belief. I will talk more of this crucial scene later, when comparing it with Poulenc’s *Carmélites*; for now I will simply state that in order to understand the dramatic impetus of the opera overall, one must give oneself over to the notion expressed by the Pilgrim in this scene: “He has given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death.” It is unlikely that a man repelled by or indifferent to the supernatural element of Christianity would make a moment such as this, even symbolically, the centerpiece of his life’s most ambitious work. It is also the centrepiece of his D major Symphony, as the thematic material of the Romanza and the note to the manuscript of the score at the beginning of this movement attest.

Also contrasting to this theory is the care and dramatic sense which Vaughan Williams gave to performances of the Bach passions. It is unlikely that a man concerned with Bach for solely musical purposes would bother to translate the *Passions* into English for performance, and even if RVW's nationalism is taken well into account on this issue, it is quite unlikely that he would have done such innovative and dramatic things in the performance of those works. For example, he wrote in his Bach Choir program notes as early as 1923, when discussing the problems of performing the Bach Passions with a large modern choir:

It seems ridiculous and outside the bounds of dramatic proportion to give the words of the Apostles or the questions of Peter to more than a few voices; these numbers have therefore been assigned to the semi-chorus. One exception, however, has been made: the words 'truly, this was the Son of God' belong not to the 'Centurion and they that were with him', but are the triumphant outcry of the whole world (UVW 426).

Unless we are willing to paint RVW as a bit of an audience-manipulating cynic, we must understand these words to have truly meant something to him; we might even be so bold as to suggest that he meant exactly what he wrote. It is also worth noting that these words are roughly contemporary to the first performance of *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, which was premiered the year before, and later incorporated into the final version of the *Pilgrim*.

Another example of RVW's dramatic approach to Bach comes in an example of his insight into the St. John. As Mrs. Vaughan Williams has written:

...he made them sing the first 'whom seek ye' in a truculent way, the hunting pack in full cry. Then, after that strange description 'they went backward and fell to the ground', the second time they answered 'Jesus of Nazareth' they had to be a frightened crowd. (UVW 429)

This interpretation can only be accounted for in one of two ways: either Vaughan Williams had become an expert at suspending his disbelief to the point of making deep observations about the Christian understanding of these biblical verses - or he had simply understood how terrifying it would be to be involved in violent contact with the Son of God, even from the illusory security of an angry mob. Neither understanding implies any rejection on RVW's part of the supernatural element of Christianity, at least not actively or decisively. If anything, they suggest a willingness to accept such a supernatural element. Either way, it is obvious that Vaughan Williams didn't find the scriptural description "strange" in any way-he understood dramatically why they would have been frightened, and his interpretation of Bach's music makes sense of the matter.

Along with these examples, a further look into Vaughan Williams's beliefs concerning the nature of music itself will help to clear up a great deal of confusion as to where he stood regarding these issues. The following quote is from an article of his from 1920 called "The Letter and the Spirit":

Before going any further may we take it that the object of an art is to obtain a partial revelation of that which is beyond human senses and human faculties-of that, in fact, which is spiritual? And that the means we employ to induce this revelation are those very senses and faculties themselves? The human, visible, audible, and intelligible media which artists (of all kinds) use, are symbols not of other visible and audible things but of what lies beyond sense and knowledge (National Music, p.122).

He restated this belief many times throughout his career, most succinctly perhaps, in 1954's "The Making of Music":

Music is a reaching out to the ultimate realities by means of ordered sound (National Music, p 206).

Two things are easily gained by revisiting these quotes: first, that

Vaughan Williams believed in a spiritual reality beyond human faculties, and second, that he believed that reality to be the "ultimate reality." This is not such a nebulous description as some might initially think. Theologians and philosophers have used the phrase "ultimate reality", since the time of Hegel, as a description of God. All of this is very difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile to a notion of Vaughan Williams as a rational humanist opposed somehow to the supernatural elements of Christianity. Furthermore, an awareness that this predominant interpretation of Vaughan Williams's beliefs might ultimately be incorrect actually enables us to see the *Pilgrim* in a more sensible light. Once we are willing to go this far, we find ourselves in a position to take the opera at face value, entering directly into the allegory. If not, we are forced to read the opera as a convoluted metaphor: a Christian allegory, explicitly stated, yet not intended to mean the things it says. I think half the reason the *Pilgrim* is not taken as seriously as it ought to be is that Vaughan Williams scholars seem to have bent over backwards to write disclaimers about the composer's agnosticism, as though suggesting "Don't worry, folks, he really didn't mean it" would help the cause of his opera. But what if he really did mean it? It is on this premise that I will proceed, and it is on this premise that I believe the dramatic content of the opera becomes evident. Most significantly, it is with all of this in mind that we can most beneficially compare and contrast the *Pilgrim* to the *Rake* and the *Carmelites* regarding the two most serious charges generally leveled against it: either that it is non-dramatic or that its dramatic content belongs in a cathedral rather than an opera house.

Defenders of the *Pilgrim* are quick to point out that Wagner's operas are quite often more static in nature than it is, and yet they aren't routinely decried as non-dramatic. Even Mozart's *Magic Flute* contains esoteric and ritualistic elements that are accepted and, I am told, enjoyed by opera audiences. True as these examples are, the shocking fact is that one need not even look outside the very decade in which the *Pilgrim* was premiered to find examples of successful operas with these same characteristics. The *Carmelites* is not primarily concerned with exterior action, but with the dialogue between the characters. Poulenc was very careful that his orchestration did not cover up the clarity of Bernanos's text, for the intricacies of the words sung contain the central action of the plot. The crucial notion of the opera is that of spiritual substitution. It is 1793, during the reign of terror, and Sister Blanche, a young novice from a noble family is terrified of death, yet desires to become a Carmelite nun (a precarious vocation at the time). She meets the old prioress, who is dying and has never feared death, but who ultimately dies horribly, plagued by doubt in the very God she has all her life believed in. Another young nun suggests later to Blanche that the prioress must have died someone else's death, so that the other person, who must fear death tremendously, will be enabled to die a more peaceful one: the one the prioress should, by merit, have earned. This suggestion is realized, subtly, at the end of the opera when Blanche, who has run away from the convent to escape martyrdom, and subsequently the vow of martyrdom which she took with her sisters, returns and mounts the scaffold, guillotined as she prays peacefully.

The plot is obviously not without drama. The ending, with the constant sound of the guillotine in the music, and the number of singers dwindling from a chorus down to the solo voice of Blanche, is haunting and, even for those who can only appreciate it on a superficial level, at least shocking. Yet despite the mostly "static" nature of the convent scenes, and despite the ritual of the nuns displayed in the opera, I know of no one suggesting that it be performed in cathedrals instead of opera houses. Moreover, the central tension of the plot is strikingly similar to that of the *Pilgrim*. As I mentioned before, Act I Scene 2 is crucial to our understanding of Vaughan Williams's opera. The difference is that RVW has displayed it symbolically rather than physically, as Poulenc has. Yet the coming of the Pilgrim to the cross is permeated by this same notion of substitution: the death of Christ for the life of the Pilgrim, and of all humanity. Just as with Sister Blanche and the prioress, it doesn't mean that the Pilgrim won't die, but that he will die more peacefully and faithfully by that help. The major difference with the Pilgrim is that, because of its allegorical and symbolic form, the audience is invited to truly enter into the drama, personally. In other words, we can empathize with Sister Blanche, but we can actually become the Pilgrim (indeed, Bunyan comes out afterwards and asks us to do just that). Perhaps this

immediacy, this entering into the spiritual struggle of the Pilgrim was precisely the thing that made it difficult to accept. Perhaps the critics found it too spiritually challenging, deciding to ignore it rather than deal with it. Unfortunately they had the perfect excuse at the time: Vaughan Williams was passé, too old, his “best” music was surely behind him. Fortunately, history tends to erase those sorts of considerations. Bach’s B Minor Mass, quite “behind the times” musically in its day, is revered now. I think this will be the case, eventually, for the *Pilgrim*.

Having said this, Poulenc’s opera has entered the repertoire, and is regularly, if not frequently, performed. Perhaps it has an advantage over the *Pilgrim* in its obviously sensational ending (“Come! See Nuns Executed!” Tawdry, but perhaps it sells tickets?) One thing, however, is that it dispels any notion that the *Pilgrim* is too religious for the operatic stage. *Dialogues des Carmelites* is far more overtly religious, in the denominational sense, than the *Pilgrim*. Like RVW’s opera, it is a sacred work which has invaded the predominantly secular genre of opera. But this in no way diminishes its status as operatic. Just as Sister Blanche must actually mount the scaffold, physically, for the piece to be effective dramatically, so must the Pilgrim, physically and visually, come to the empty Cross, or, for that matter, enter the gates of Heaven beyond the River of Death for it to be fully realized artistically. Of course it presupposes the audience has some knowledge of what this symbolizes, but what work of art doesn’t make such presuppositions? Nothing else would convey the powerful turn of events in the opera. How else would the Pilgrim go from a neurotic mess, afraid of death, to someone willing to face death at every turn for the duration of the opera (and his life), until the end when he gladly crosses the River of Death? The answer is clear. Either Act I Scene 2 works, transforming the Pilgrim, or the whole opera is a dramatic flop. To me, it runs right to the heart of the issue perfectly, and there is no question of its success artistically.

The Rake’s Progress, as I have mentioned earlier, has almost no overt religious quality to it at all. A foolish young man is lured to his near-ultimate damnation by the devil (Nick Shadow-who bares a striking and, I think, direct resemblance to C.S. Lewis’s *Uncle Screwtape*, also a wartime character). He is saved, after a series of often hilarious parodies of society, from complete damnation only by the power of his true love’s faithfulness (His true love is called, not surprisingly, Anne Truelove). Though it is subtitled “a moral fable”, I have yet to hear of anyone suggesting that such a designation disqualifies it from operatic production. Almost the entire opera may be read as an augmentation of Act III Scene 1 of the *Pilgrim*, but with a difference: Tom Rakewell succumbs to every temptation available in Vanity Fair while the Pilgrim resists. As a result, Vaughan Williams’s opera must press on. Not satisfied to merely point out the fallacies of high life in the city, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* deals with a multitude of other spiritual issue. Among these are how to deal with physical or psychological fear of death (Apollyon), how to deal with easily accessible sensual pleasure (Vanity Fair), how to deal with despair (the Pilgrim in Prison), and how to deal with hypocrisy (the By-Ends). It will be noticed that this flow of scenes is not really static, but that one builds upon another. The most basic of fears is first, and progressively the temptations become more subtle, until the Pilgrim has conquered all of them. Thus they are real acts and scenes, and not mere independent tableaux which could have been arranged in another order.

The Rake does not penetrate so deeply, nor does it set out to. Rather, it lampoons Rakewell while surreptitiously enticing the audience to enjoy the same debauchery it lampoons. We are not, after all, supposed to approve of Mother Goose’s brothel, but we are encouraged to enjoy looking at the half-naked whores and roaring boys in the scene. Vaughan Williams’s opera really leaves little room for this sort of thing, despite Vanity Fair. There is really very little humor in the *Pilgrim*, save in Act IV Scene 1 (the By-Ends), and the moral is clear. Unless one finds it beautiful, one cannot find it anything but uncomfortable or annoying. Likewise, the epilogue of the *Rake* has the cast reappear, without their wigs on, and jokingly wag their fingers at the audience, telling them the moral equivalent of “Now, now! Be good and don’t be naughty!” while the epilogue to the *Pilgrim* returns to Bunyan, quietly extending his book, entreating you to join him and embark upon a journey to the Holy Land beyond the River of Death. It is not hard to see which would be more spiritually challenging for the audience and critics.

One final point of interest is worth recording at the present time, primarily concerning the final act of the opera, *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*. Surely if a scene in this opera can be called non-dramatic, this would be the one most open to the criticism. Yet it is worth noting that a young C.S. Lewis witnessed a performance of the piece in its earlier form, as a one act “Pastoral Episode” in 1926. This was his response to the piece, written in his Diary:

The Vaughan Williams Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains was above praise: words, music, acting and lighting all really unified and the result quite unearthly . . . [Afterwards the] Bach Coffee Cantata and the Purcell ballet of the Gentleman Dancing Master were both delightful and one didn’t really mind descending from the heights (Lewis, p.389).

A short entry, but the man who wrote it was an ardent and lifelong fan of Wagner. Also, it ought to be mentioned that Lewis, though known later as a Christian apologist, was at the time an atheist. Now whether an atheist would have reacted well to the coming of the Pilgrim to the Cross is another matter entirely, but any problems one might have with it would be theological rather than dramatic.

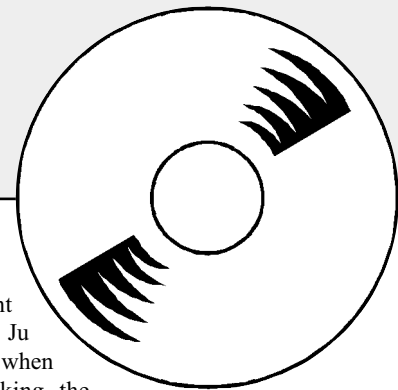
To conclude, I would like to stress the preliminary nature of this article’s inquiries. If much of what I have put forth seems more of an overarching summary of the topics at hand than an in-depth study, it is because that is precisely what they are. It is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather introductory. I would particularly stress that Dr. Byron Adams’s theories concerning Vaughan Williams’s beliefs ought not to be confined or summarized, as they may seem in this article, by the term “rational humanist” and are deserving of much deeper discussion, which I may, perhaps, respectfully partake of in the future if there is any interest. There is also much more to say about both the “interior virtues” and the unique place which *The Pilgrim’s Progress* holds in the history of opera. Those, however, would prove another article or two. I consider it an honor to have written this article for the Journal, and am thrilled to be one of the newest members of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, which has already done so much to champion this composer’s indispensable music.

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Record Review



The Film Music of RVW

Scott of the Antarctic, *Coastal Command* and *The People's Land*
Rumon Gamba, BBC Philharmonic on Chandos 10007 (full price)



Hot on the heels of Richard Hickox's premiere recording of the original version of *A London Symphony*, and the completed *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 2*, has come the release of Volume 1 of *The Film Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* in the Chandos Movies series.

Lovers of English music owe a real debt of gratitude to the young conductor Rumon Gamba not only for his recent championing of Edmund Rubbra's music, but now for giving us the premiere recording of the complete music for *Scott of the Antarctic*. This is a real ear-opener, and film music of a very high standard indeed. It appears that only about half of the music RVW wrote ever found its way into the film. It is therefore perhaps understandable that the composer decided to turn it into a symphony rather than let it go to waste. Even so, there is a considerable amount that didn't even make it into the symphony. One wonders why this music remained unrecorded for half a century. By the way, listen out for a snippet of the music removed from the original score of the *London Symphony* (and restored in the award-winning version recently recorded by Hickox). It occurs in the fourth item of the Antarctic music (Sculpture Scene). One also wonders what fresh surprises await us when Chandos get round to volumes 2 & 3 in this series. As it is, this CD also contains the premiere recording of the music for *The People's Land*, a quite delightful piece comprising skilfully orchestrated and linked folk tunes lasting about 13 minutes.

The other work on the recording is the now more familiar suite from *Coastal Command*, again film music of a high standard. The seventh movement of the suite is, of course, entitled Battle of the Beauforts. As I could not recall there being any aircraft of this type featured in the film, I was prompted to get out my aged video, and watch it with my 'World War II aircraft anorak' hat on (if there is such a thing as an anorak hat). I was wrong. Three Bristol Beauforts feature in the attack on the German raider (the *Düsseldorf*). But they do so without any musical accompaniment at all. Why then was this movement so titled? Can

anyone throw any light upon this mystery? What the music accompanies is the dogfight between Beaufighters and Ju 88s, near the end of the film, when the German aircraft attacking the damaged Sunderland T for Tommy are put to flight.

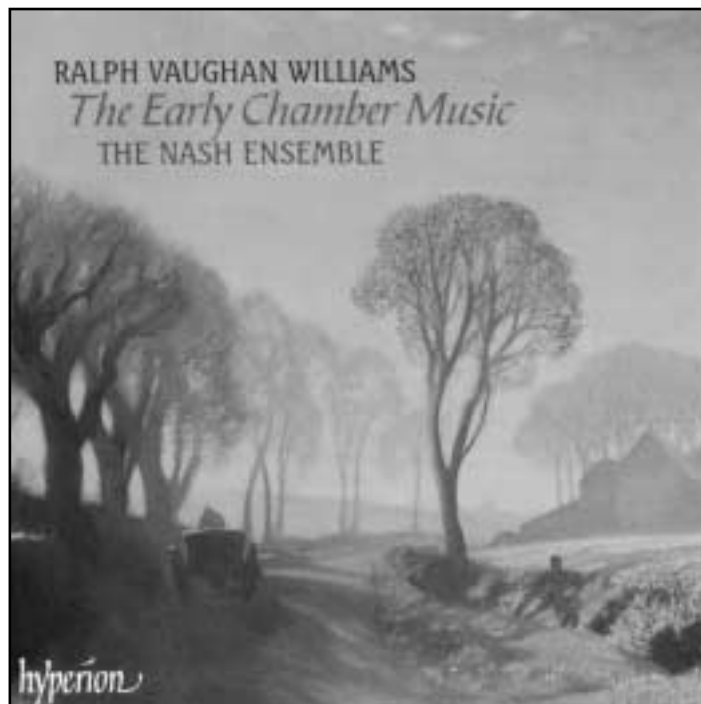
As a matter of interest the aircraft types appearing in the film are (in order of appearance): Short Sunderland, Focke-Wulf FW 200 (a fleeting glimpse), Consolidated Catalina, Curtiss P40 (of US Army Air Force), Lockheed Hudson, Bristol Beaufort, Junkers Ju 88, and Bristol Beaufighter. The action sequences are very impressive, and look as though they are from combat film.

This brings me to a minor quibble about the sleeve notes to this CD. These are credited to Michael Kennedy, so I write this with some trepidation! The notes imply that the Hudson was a flying boat, which it decidedly was not. It goes on to say that the Beauforts fought off the Ju 88s (as suggested by the title of the movement). As stated above this task was achieved by the Beaufighters, a far superior aircraft. Any Beaufort (a torpedo bomber) attempting to 'mix it' with Ju 88s, would almost certainly have come off worse. That is if the Beaufort could catch the Junkers up!

This anorak-type quibble aside, however, I count this CD, along with the Hickox restored *London Symphony*, to be my most satisfying CD purchase for many a year!

Michael Gainsford

The Early Chamber Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams
The Nash Ensemble – Hyperion CDA67381/2 (2CDs – full price)



This new two disc set from Hyperion, attractively packaged under the title *The Early Chamber Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, contains a total of 134 minutes of music, including the first commercially available

performances of no fewer than six pieces of chamber music by VW. There are first recordings of three major works - a *String Quartet in C minor* and a *Quintet in D major* for the unusual combination of clarinet, horn, violin, cello and piano, both dating from 1898, and a *Piano Quintet in C minor* from 1903, revised in 1904 and 1905 – and of three shorter pieces, a *Nocturne and Scherzo* for String Quintet of 1906, a *Scherzo* for String Quintet (which is a completely different second part of the immediately preceding piece in its original 1904 incarnation as a *Ballad and Scherzo*), and a later piece, the *Romance and Pastorale* for violin and piano. This last piece was the only one of these six compositions previously published (in 1923), but Michael Kennedy surmises in his notes for the discs that it was written before WW1 and dates from around 1914.

In addition to these, there are three previously recorded rarities none of which is, in truth, an “early” work, but new recordings of all of which are nevertheless welcome – the *Suite de Ballet* for flute and piano, again of uncertain date, but probably from either side of WW1, the *Romance* for viola and piano from around 1914, and the *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes* (also known as *Household Music*) dating from 1940/1, which is played here by a string quartet, rather than in the string orchestra version familiar from the Chandos recording (with *Riders to the Sea* and *Flos Campi*, on CHAN9392).

The background to the sudden appearance of the first five compositions mentioned above is that they have lain unpublished in manuscript in the British Library since being donated by Ursula Vaughan Williams after VW’s death. In his notes for a concert performance of some of the pieces at the British Library on 20 February 2001 Bernard Benoliel, the then artistic director of RVW Limited, which has been instrumental in now authorising their publication (in conjunction with Faber Music), describes how Ursula had originally written a note on most of the early manuscripts, in accordance with VW’s instructions, saying that he did not wish them to have further performances. Among the reasons given by Bernard Benoliel for this having now changed was that there was perceived to be a real risk of the pieces being pirated and that rough, unedited editions would have been the worst outcome for VW’s reputation. It was also recognised that, as worldwide interest in the composer’s music increased, many students and scholars would legitimately wish to have easy access to compositions from this early period of his composing career.

What we have with these new recordings is, however, by no means only of academic interest. On the contrary, the music is mostly genuinely fresh and inventive, and often shows the great melodic gift for which the mature VW is rightly renowned. If the earliest pieces lack the characteristic fingerprints that make his later music so instantly recognisable, they nevertheless show the innate musicality of a great composer still at the stage of developing his unique voice. There is also no sense of the five newly published works being all of one type – instead they show a wide range of experimentation and influence.

The Piano Quintet may reasonably claim to be the best of the new pieces. The scoring includes a double bass, rather than a second violin (like Schubert’s *Trout Quintet*), and the piece is in three substantial movements, each of around 10 minutes duration. The first movement begins with a confident, bubbling, rather Brahmsian theme of real quality and memorability, which then leads into a yearning second subject. The Andante that follows has echoes of the composer’s contemporary song settings, particularly *Silent Noon*, and rises to a dramatic climax, before subsiding back into reverie. The finale, a Fantasia (quasi variazioni), brings an immediate surprise for those familiar with VW’s later works, as its theme was reused by the composer over 50 years later for the last movement of the *Violin Sonata*. However, its treatment here is quite different from that work and this is the only example I can immediately think of in VW’s entire output where he appears to indulge in deliberate pastiche – the five variations that follow the initial statement of the theme are, I believe, consciously in the styles of other composers, including Wagner in the second and Mendelssohn in the third. There is also some anticipation, in the bell peals in the piano part, of the accompaniment written later for the song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*. Bernard Benoliel, in working on the manuscript of this piece, concluded that at one point VW

must have performed it with a string orchestra, rather than individual strings, accompanying the piano, but it certainly sounds natural enough in the chamber version recorded here.

The other quintet, which dates from 1898, shortly after VW completed his studies with Max Bruch in Berlin, includes prominent roles for clarinet and horn, and the writing for all the instruments, including the piano, is felicitous and fresh. There is no sense here of a young composer struggling to write coherent or memorable music, nor any justification for the jibe that VW could not write well for the piano. Instead the piece fairly overflows with exuberance and confidence in its writing for all five players. In four movements, an opening *Allegro moderato* and high-spirited *Allegro molto* finale frame a charming *Intermezzo*, which is almost like a hesitation waltz, and a flowing *Andantino*. About two minutes into the *Andantino*, there is a brief foretaste of one of the themes in the first movement of the *Fifth Symphony*.

The String Quartet of 1898 is in four movements and, like VW’s two mature works in this genre, is also in a minor key. The most significant influence here is Dvorak, but there are echoes of Brahms and Tchaikovsky as well. The second movement *Andantino* contains a suggestion of a folk tune and there is a lively set of variations with fugal finale in the fourth movement, but overall this is a less memorable piece than the two quintets discussed above.

The *Nocturne and Scherzo* is a curiosity, with some attractive interplay among the individual strings sitting uneasily next to uncharacteristic Wagnerian chromatics in the *Nocturne*. The *Scherzo*, by contrast, involves an English folksong (As I walked out) entwined in a web of fleet-footed strings and pizzicato effects derived from Debussy and Ravel. The earlier *Scherzo* (1904) starts promisingly, contains a march and some fugal treatment of its themes, and has attractive harmonic string effects in its more sedate central section, but overall it is not convincing and one can see why VW replaced it.

The Romance and Pastorale for violin and piano is a rhapsodic *Andantino* followed by a modal section that intermittently conjures up echoes of *The Lark Ascending*. The (probably) contemporary *Romance* for viola and piano is a one movement work of some six minutes, which, along with the *Suite de Ballet*, was found in VW’s papers after his death and was published in 1962. It is largely lyrical and reflective, with quite a lot of double-stopping in the viola part, and it ends poetically. Both this and the *Romance and Pastorale* are attractive, but essentially introspective, pieces.

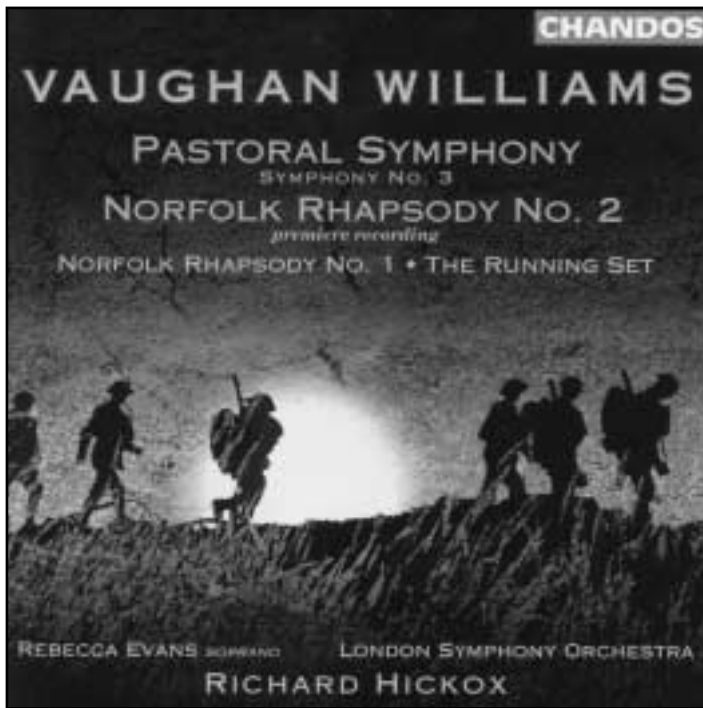
The *Suite de Ballet* is one of VW’s folk song-inspired works, in four short movements, none of which lasts more than two minutes. It is in an elegant French style, at times almost reminiscent of Poulenc, with a jig-like Humoresque as its second section. The third movement, a *Gavotte*, seems to have danced in from *Old King Cole*.

Finally to *Household Music*, which consists of variations on three Welsh hymn tunes - Crug-y-bar, St Denis and Aberystwyth. This was written with a view to being performed by whatever combination of instruments happened to be at hand during wartime. Its original conception was, however, as recorded here, for conventional string quartet. Oddly, given that the horn player was on hand for the D major quintet, those responsible for the recording decided to dispense with the horn ad lib. part that VW also wrote. Despite the work’s utilitarian title (which has surely contributed to its neglect), the settings are affectionate musings on beautiful and not over-familiar tunes and they make an attractive conclusion to the second disc and to the whole recital.

Hats off to all involved in both the planning and realisation of these discs and the underlying editing of VW’s manuscripts for the five newly published pieces. The members of the Nash Ensemble play faultlessly and with real conviction throughout. The recording is also excellent, well balanced and immediate. This is an essential purchase for anyone interested in VW’s early development or in English chamber music generally.

Martin Murray

A Pastoral Symphony, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1, Norfolk Rhapsody No. 2 and The Running Set. Richard Hickox, London Symphony Orchestra, Rebecca Evans, soprano, Chandos CHAN 10001 (full price)



The *Norfolk Rhapsody No.1* was the first of three such pieces Vaughan Williams wrote in 1905 and 1906 with the intention that they should be performed together as a sort of Norfolk symphony, each one based on folk tunes he had collected himself. The major theme of the first rhapsody is *The Captain's Apprentice*, but the piece does not, on the whole, share the profound melancholy of the original song. On the contrary, it's a rather lush, pastoral tone poem suggesting, at its opening and close, the mists of the East Anglian countryside. The composer allows himself considerable liberty of expression, and indeed the treatment of *The Captain's Apprentice* is sometimes quite surprisingly romantic, its chromatic accompanying lines even recalling Delius for a fleeting moment near the beginning. Contrast is provided by the tunes *The Basket of Eggs* and *The Bold Young Sailor*. Richard Hickox is equally at home in the misty fens as in the more lively central section. This is a lovely performance.

Vaughan Williams later radically revised the first rhapsody but withdrew the other two. The score of No. 3 seems to have disappeared, but here we have the first performance since 1914 of No. 2, edited, and with two missing pages recomposed, by Stephen Hogger. It's a lovely piece and one wonders why the composer was dissatisfied with it. Like the first rhapsody it is based on three tunes, *Young Henry the Poacher*, *All on Spurn Point* and *The Saucy Bold Robber*, and the two pieces are similar in form too. The work seems more restrained than the first rhapsody, and since Vaughan Williams seems sometimes almost to overwhelm *The Captain's Apprentice* I prefer this. The return of *Young Henry the Poacher* towards the end of the piece leads the music to its quiet close with an uncanny pre-echo of the violin solo from the opening of the *Pastoral Symphony*.

The Running Set was composed in 1933 for the National Folk Dance Festival. Four folk tunes – *Barrack Hill*, *The Blackthorn Stick*, *Irish Reel* and *Cock o' the North* – are presented in rather dizzying succession as well as in counterpoint with each other, in a rapid two-in-a-bar time which never lets up during the piece's six and half minutes. It is played here with that brilliant and apparently effortless virtuosity which we have come to expect from the London Symphony Orchestra and which some of us may even take for granted.

Whilst the presence of the second rhapsody makes this an essential disc for all Vaughan Williams enthusiasts and scholars, most people will be attracted to it for the *Pastoral Symphony*. I don't think they will be disappointed, but I wonder how many Society members, indulging in the

artificial habit of comparing one performance with another, will be quite so happy with it. In the first movement the "Corot-like landscape in the sunset" described to Ursula Wood in 1938 is well painted by the conductor and his marvellous orchestra, though I found myself wishing the music would move on a little more in the opening minutes in response to the two *più mosso* indications in the score. I feel a certain emotional detachment in this playing, though I'm at a loss to explain it or cite examples, and even more so in the second movement where the elegiac atmosphere is more pronounced. The playing of the long trumpet solo is inspired, with impeccable intonation and immense subtlety of vibrato; and the conductor supports his soloist by creating a remarkable sense of calm. The return of this music is also extremely well played by the horn and clarinet soloists, but would, I think, have been even more affecting had greater difference been made between the horn's *piano* and the clarinet's *pianissimo* markings. The music which forms the major part of the movement is taken at a fairly slow general pulse which, to this listener at least, robs it of some of its regretful and yearning quality. I find the scherzo the least convincing reading here, its different elements never quite adding up to a whole. The extraordinary, scampering coda is magnificently done however, placed and played with understanding and conviction. Rebecca Evans is the soprano soloist in the final movement, and she sings most beautifully her two very difficult passages, so I find it a pity she wasn't placed more distantly. The reading of the rest of the movement leaves me dry-eyed, and once more it's difficult to pinpoint quite why, a most unsatisfactory state of affairs, though I suppose if it were possible to perceive exactly how a conductor achieves the effect required it would be possible also to do it oneself. Having said that, the final impassioned outburst, though played for all it's worth by the LSO strings, seems less striking at least in part because the conductor chooses not to build up to it in the preceding pages. The first real statement of the theme which will become this outburst – played by cellos, supported by tremolando strings and harp – lacks urgency and when it is taken up by the solo flute the conductor slows the music down in a way unasked for in the score and which I find unconvincing and damaging to what follows.

Even if this *Pastoral Symphony* left me relatively unmoved I hope members will buy it and judge for themselves. My favourite readings are Norrington and Haitink, but music is such a subjective affair, thank goodness, that others may think differently. In any case this disc can be purchased safe in the knowledge that the music is magnificently well played and recorded, that the other works on the disc are of great interest and exceptionally well done, and that Michael Kennedy's note is both informative – naming all the folk songs I didn't already know – and touching in itself.

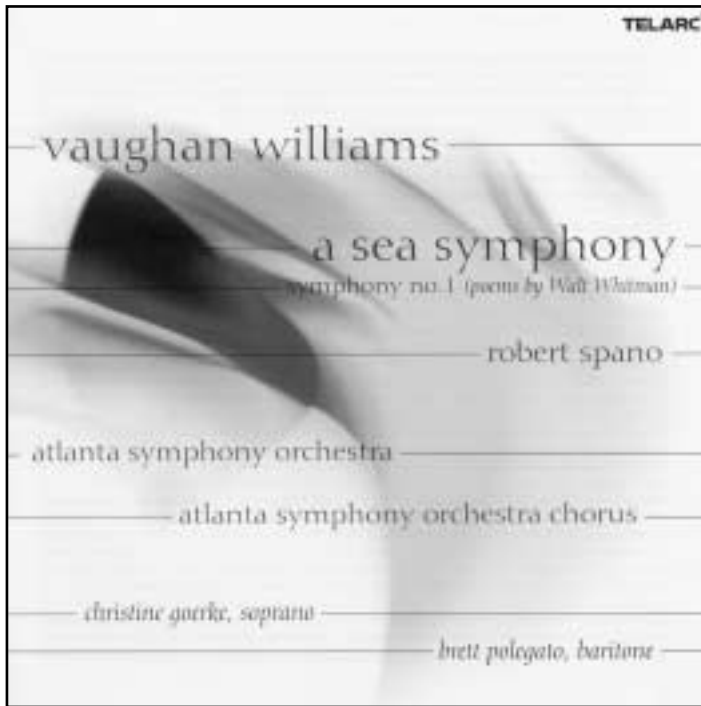
William Hedley

Vaughan Williams, A Sea Symphony, Atlanta SO and Chorus Robert Spano, Brett Polegato (bar), Christine Goerke (sop), Telarc CD 80588 (61.08)

The Atlanta Symphony benefited for many years from the presence of choral maestro Robert Shaw and the chorus is very good indeed. Now some people find the American accent not to their taste in the 'English' idiom. However the *Sea Symphony* has an American text and the opening bars are to my mind exhilarating. Clear diction and excellent clear sound get this Telarc disc off to a wonderful start. Conductor Robert Spano has full measure of his forces and the result is a fine addition to the list. In fact if memory serves it is the first professional recording not conceived or ending up as part of a cycle: it is also the first by an American orchestra.

Where does it stand in the maritime table? Well, that is a difficult one. The degree of space given to the chorus is significantly deeper than in the other discs. I also feel that the London orchestras favoured a mix that placed the chorus just on top of the main body-Boult's last voyage is a good example and Andrew Davis equally so. The Atlanta chorus is differentiated to a greater degree and this is refreshing, especially in the first movement. Haitink achieves clarity but the orchestral sound is not as correspondingly rich though in the last movement it has more momentum

even if it is considerably slower. In fact the Dutchman flies in ten minutes later than the Atlantans who traverse this ocean very smartly.



A crucial difference between Haitink and Spano lies in 'On the beach at night alone'. In a similar manner to his *London Symphony*, the Dutch maestro surrounds his soloist Jonathan Summers with atmospheric imagery. Brett Polegato walks the sand with something akin to tense melodrama. In fact would it be too much to suggest there is a bit of the American affection for *Peter Grimes* easing in. At any rate there is a distally operatic ambience.

The Scherzo relies on the delicate racking up of tension amidst some Debussian waves. Haitink is well regarded in the French idiom and has an impressionistic sweep. Spano confronts a nasty sou'wester resulting in urgency and sacrificing control of tension with a clever sense of the ongoing struggle. Boult back in 1953 favoured a sense of the inexorable and is closer to Haitink but adds an eerie layer emphasised by the mono sound. The transformation into march tempo shows Boult at his most English whilst Spano inevitably leaves more than a trace of Richard Rodgers in our ears.

The last movement brings beautiful singing from the Atlanta chorus but not the magic in Boult's vintage recording. I think Spano scores over his rivals in sound quality and generally in detail. However if he falters, it is affection for the lush sections which he edges a tad towards slush. I don't think the sound on Bryden Thomson's recording is anything like as good as Spano but perhaps he has a greater knowledge of the music's provenance; Haitink has excellent sound and a broader understanding of the important position of the symphony in the canon of British music. Boult naturally contains this in his bones but he cannot match the sound of recent recordings.

Mark Asquith

Vaughan Williams - Symphony No.8, Walton - Crown Imperial, Bax - Oboe Quartet (orch. Barbirolli), Rawsthorne - Street Corner Overture, Delius - On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring, Elgar - Land of Hope and Glory, The British National Anthem, Halle Orchestra, Kathleen Ferrier, Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, Evelyn Rothwell (oboe), Sir John Barbirolli (rec. 1951-69) BBCL 4100-2 (73.08)

This is an enjoyable *Eighth*. It was a favourite of Barbirolli to whom it was dedicated, and we can tell. The sound is another matter. The first few minutes are in re-created stereo as the broadcast feed lost the stereo link. Unfortunately it leaves the wonderful tuned percussion flat and dim. The stereo feed is as thin as it gets with intermittent crackle at the bottom end.

At least we are spared the bronchial utterances that have spoiled other BBC recordings (especially Beecham's Sibelius). The performance is worth the cost of the disc, warm and beautifully paced, perhaps not as atmospheric as Boult's initial recording or indeed Sir John's Pye-Nixa session.

However the blustering *Street Corner Overture* from the same source is good as it gets. This is a badly neglected work from a composer worth two of some of those marginal European symphonists like Hartmann, Schmidt and Malipiero. I can only urge those not in possession of it to find a copy of the symphonies before the Lyrita disc finally slithers away.

The Walton, bright and direct, is constrained by opaque sound, a problem that affects Delius's miniature masterpiece as well - the sort of off-stage clunking Hallé violist and author Malcolm Tillis used to moan about. The Bax arrangement adds nought really to the composer's notion except the chance to hear it. I have to say that Sir John was not a colourful orchestrator as is apparent from his Elizabethan musings which are routine beside Rubbra's *Farnaby Pieces* for example. It is well played here in fair but dry stereo sound.

The Ferrier item comes from a Barbirolli Society acetate which sounds as if it has a hole in it. Through this noise we can hear that incomparable contralto in marvellous voice.

Mark Asquith

The Red Shoes - The Music of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (featuring 49th Parallel (Vaughan Williams), A Matter of Life and Death, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, A Canterbury Tale (Allan Gray), The Red Shoes, Black Narcissus, Gone to Earth, The Small Back Room (Brian Easdale), Tales of Hoffman extr. (Offenbach), Various Orchestras from Original Soundtracks CD41-002 (74.01).

On this excellent CD we have over eight minutes of the original 49th *Parallel* music including the beautiful Epilogue and the Prologue spoken by an uncredited Vincent Massey. It is amazing to think that the conductor of the film copy Ernest Irving thought it unsatisfactory. However readers of his biography *Cue for Music* suggests he always knew best! The sound is a little crumbly at first but perfectly acceptable.

There are many treasures on this disc notably the soundtrack recording of *The Red Shoes* Ballet conducted by Beecham and the splendid score for *Gone to Earth* played by the Boyd Neel Orchestra. In addition John Geilgud reads 'An Airman's Letter to his Mother' which is much more inspiring than the title indicates.

Most of the music is from the film soundtrack and includes some evocative dialogue and in the case of *Gone to Earth*, the chasing pack of hounds.

Mark Asquith

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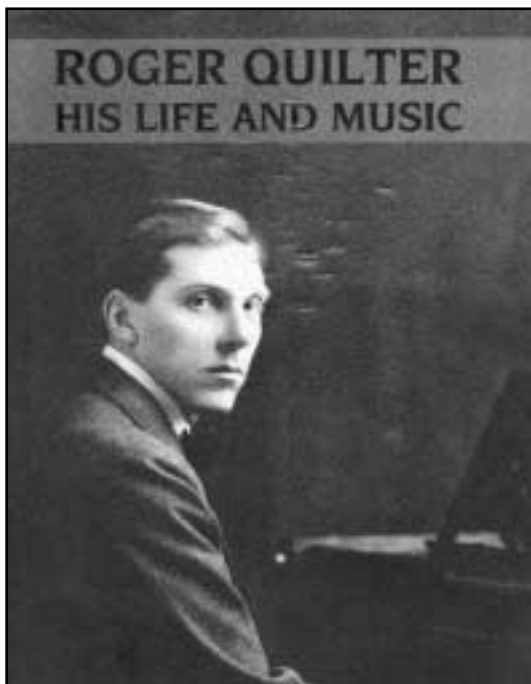
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BOOK REVIEWS

Roger Quilter - His Life and Music by Valerie Langfield.
(Boydell Press, 2002, ISBN 0-85115-871-4, 375 pages with CD.
£40.00)



With interest in the lyrical and tender music of Roger Quilter growing steadily, Valerie Langfield has written an authoritative and comprehensive work on both Quilter's life and music. This 375-page book, with its detailed Appendices, will surely become the standard reference document on Quilter.

The book is in two sections. The first part (pages 1-110) concentrates on the composer's life from his early years in Hove to his death in 1953. The second part covers his entire output (pages 111 - 278). The Appendices include a family tree, Catalogue of Works, Discography and Bibliography. There is the added bonus of a CD including Quilter accompanying Herbert Eisdell in a 1923 recording of *To Julia* and conducting the Victor Olof Orchestra in a 1930 recording of extracts from *Where the Rainbow Ends*.

Roger Quilter's family enjoyed immense wealth. His father was a founder of the National Telegraph Company and Valerie Langfield estimates his fortune at £70 million in today's terms. The family lived for a while in the sumptuous Hintlesham Hall, near Ipswich (now a 5 star hotel) before settling at Bawdsey Manor near Felixstowe, with a Mayfair house at 74, South Audley Street. Unlike Vaughan Williams, whose strength of character could handle the benefits of personal wealth, Quilter was plagued by it. He wrote: "I have the rich, upper-middle class blood in my veins too much, I'm not strong enough to fight it". Not a bad position to have, we might say, but the sensitive, shy composer was surrounded by artistic indifference, family tensions from an unhappy marriage and stuffy Victorian values, all of which depressed him greatly. He was also physically weak and seemingly always ill – influenza, arthritis, sinus trouble, rheumatism, prostate problems, neuralgia and so on. Valerie Langfield chronicles his ill health with sympathy and notes that, despite his poor health, he outlived all his brothers and sisters. His physical problems, coupled with natural shyness, often left him depressed. His homosexuality added to his self-doubt. After being admitted to a mental hospital in 1946, his behaviour became overtly homosexual. One of Valerie Langfield's saddest images is of Quilter "offering flowers to young men in the street" and giving rise to blackmail threats as a result.

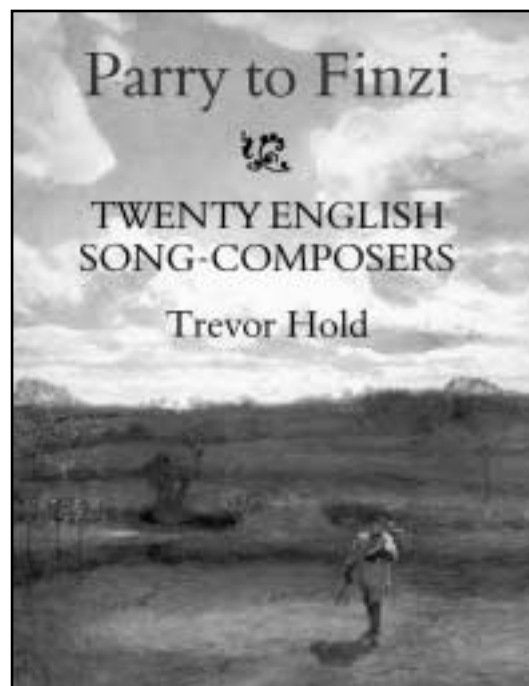
Quilter's relationship with his protective, devoted Mother resembles Rose Grainger's role in her composer-son's life and Valerie Langfield adds that Rose Grainger also had a "possessive and demanding relationship" with Quilter. Unfortunately, this is not followed up. Indeed, Valerie Langfield adopts an under-stated approach to analysis, sticking to facts insofar as these exist with limited psychoanalytical theories. At times she is perhaps too careful. Thus Percy Grainger is described as 'possibly' the most extraordinary of Quilter's friends – when clearly he was extraordinary. Personally, I would have liked more explanation of Quilter's self-doubt, of his alleged failure to meet parental expectations, of his ill health – but I admire Ms Langfield's integrity and refusal to over-elaborate.

Valerie Langfield seems happier on the more solid ground of analysing the music itself. I cannot imagine a more detailed account of the songs, of the musical *Where the Rainbow Ends* or the opera *Julia*. Every piece of music that Quilter wrote gets a mention. Even here, her under-stated appraisal may not always reflect the wonders of the music. For example, she describes the setting of Stevenson's *Three Child-Songs* as 'disappointing', yet to my ears *The Lamplighter* is quite lovely. Similarly, I would describe Rosamund's theme in the opening of *Where the Rainbow Ends* as beautiful, gorgeous. Valerie Langfield contents herself with describing the music as having "a simple balanced melody supported by some detailed part-writing".

Anyone interested in Quilter's music should have this book on their shelves. When considering *Where the Rainbow Ends*, Valerie Langfield says Quilter was "Lost in a world of if only: if only his health was better, if only all things were beautiful, if only marriages were made in heaven, if only his family were not so appalling, if only his realisation that he was homosexual was not so difficult, if only all women could be boyish, if only everything could be right with the world." At least with this superb book, there are few if onlys – just gratitude to the author for writing the definitive book on Quilter.

Stephen Connock

Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers
by Trevor Hold. (Boydell Press, 2002, ISBN No. 0 85115 887 0.
463 pages, priced £45.00 – US \$99)



Trevor Hold examines the 'English Romantic Song', with separate chapters on Parry, Stanford, Elgar, Delius, Somervell, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Quilter, Bridge, Ireland, Bax, Butterworth, Browne, Armstrong-Gibbs, Gurney, Howells, C.W.Orr, Warlock, Moeran and Finzi. To this the author adds an insightful, serious and thoughtful Introduction in which he grapples with big questions: How do we judge a successful art-song? Why does a composer set a poem to music? How do composers shape a memorable musical line without harming the poetic line? That he asks such questions is impressive enough. That he largely succeeds in answering them is a remarkable achievement.

Trevor Hold draws out the English composers' fundamentally lyrical approach to song writing, choosing predominantly serious subject matter. The impact of the First World War on these 20 composers is identified along with the influence of Parry and Stanford. The author acknowledges he is an adherent of the 'words for music' school, preferring this approach to allowing the composer freedom to set whatever takes his fancy. Given Trevor Hold's preferences, his description of, say, RVW's setting of *Is my Team Ploughing* as 'hysterical' becomes clearer. In the well known debate between Housman and Vaughan Williams, Trevor Hold's sympathies would go with the poet.

Trevor Hold's choice of the twenty composers will also raise questions. There is, for example, no room for Bantock. RVW attracts 22 pages, Warlock 43. Denis Browne is in, largely on the strength of the superb *To Gratiana dancing and singing*. It is a pity the author could not extend the analysis to embrace Benjamin Britten, but he had to draw the line somewhere. Even stopping at Finzi (born 1901) the book runs to 463 pages.

The chapters on the 20 composers are deeply impressive. Trevor Hold displays remarkable understanding and scholarship on each page. I now better understand what drew Howells to Walter de la Mare, why Warlock had such a penchant for melancholy and why Arthur Machin had a strong influence on John Ireland's songs. In every chapter there are insights.

Perhaps the least satisfactory chapter is on Vaughan Williams. Trevor Hold brings out the influences of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Stevenson and Housman without fully reflecting the impact of Shakespeare or Whitman. His analysis of the *Songs of Travel* lacks depth. He doesn't examine the influence of the First World War on *Along the field* and makes no reference to the exquisite songs from the operas – even though they were arranged by RVW.

These reservations should not deter anyone from purchasing this excellent book. It is dedicated to John Bishop – he would surely have been proud of it.

Stephen Connock

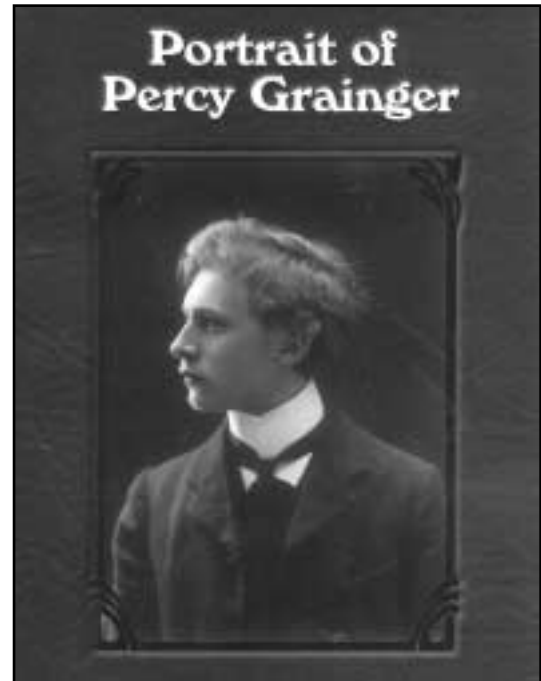
Portrait of Percy Grainger
By Malcolm Gillies and David Pear
(Boydell and Brewer Ltd, ISBN 1-58046-087-9, 220 pages with illustrations)

There are broadly two approaches to books of reminiscences. The first is to print the recollections intact, with a minimum of editorial comment. The reader can draw his or her own conclusions from the evidence presented. The second approach uses reminiscences to illustrate the subject with the author providing a continuous narrative and analysis. Malcolm Gillies and David Pear in their *Portrait of Percy Grainger* are very much in the first category. As they put it in a brief introduction, this *Portrait* is one which the reader will ultimately compile 'using whatever ingredients are preferred'.

The problems with this approach are that we rely on the judgement of the editors in their choice of recollections and considerable background knowledge on the subject is required. A thorough chronology on Grainger's life is provided, but this is not enough. As to the editor's choice of material, it seems to me to bring out Grainger's unique strengths without providing much insight into the darker side of his character.

The strengths are tellingly described: his energy, virility, enthusiasm,

breadth, physical attractiveness, originality, focus, pianistic ability and charisma. Indeed, there are rather too many 'man of genius' type of recollections. He was 'an incarnation of the unexpected'. His intense relationship with his gifted mother is well brought out, even if the early family portraits are superficial. That he was a 'bundle of contradictions', is also apparent, but there is little about his liking for flagellation or his unusual sexual proclivities. Grainger's mother's reaction to 'Percy bringing back bloody shirts day after day' is touched on but given the authors approach is not followed up. We are left with glimpses of these problems, and their causes, but not enough information to explain this complex and eccentric talent.



Antonia Sawyer's sober recollection of the events which led to the death by suicide of Grainger's mother is compelling in a descriptive way, whilst not helping us understand why she took her life. The rumours about incest, which persist to this day, are not covered. The well-known vignette by Eric Fenby is one of the best portraits, as are those by Cyril Scott. By contrast the recollections of his wife are largely uninteresting.

Some of Grainger's own works are included at the end of the book. His consistent description of himself as an 'over-soul' (genius) will offend or amuse those more used to under-statement in English composers. His description of himself as an incurable whip-worshipper, happiest when giving or taking pain, needs to be placed alongside his evident kindness, sense of fun, sheer originality and romantic impetus. Who of us cannot be moved by *The Power of Love* movement from the *Danish Folk Song Suite*, whether he whips himself or not?

An absorbing book, but one which raises more questions than it answers. Finally, readers looking for information on RVW will be disappointed. There are two references. The first is an off-hand criticism of VW's folk song arrangement by Benjamin Britten and the second is a portrait with the caption 'The eyes of Ralph Vaughan Williams'. The problem is the eyes are not RVW's – they are William Walton's!

Stephen Connock

The Best Years of British Film-music, 1936-1958
by Jan G Swynnoe
(Boydell Press, 2002, ISBN 0-85115 862 5, 243 pages)

This book is far more than a description of the best years of British film music – it is an impressive analysis of British film, and of British culture generally. The author explores the differences between British and American films, drawing out the British 'basic lack of affinity with the camera', theatre-orientated tradition and the ever present financial constraints. Matters were not helped by the defection to America of skilled artists such as Chaplin and Hitchcock. British film, says Jan Swynnoe, was in the 30s 'wordy, stagey and moribund', with an



insularity, dislike of symbolism and reluctance to embrace the ‘star system’. Margaret Lockwood was the classic British female lead, rather than Rita Heyworth. British films emphasized ‘beauty of voice’ (often a

somewhat patronising ‘BBC voice’) and went for a large cast of strongly individual secondary characters. By contrast, America loved melodrama and showed a flair for drama set against wonderful landscapes. In Britain, only trains were glorified, being accorded the status of honorary characters. (Quite right, I can hear you saying!)

Jan Swynnoe moves the analysis into musical responses, with equally impressive results. American composers were part of the studio system with a ‘jobsworth’ mentality. Such salaried composers dare not attract corporate disapproval. In being formula driven, they became anonymous – except for Bernard Herrmann. British film composers, by contrast, were attracted by the challenge and by an unknown medium. They were given greater artistic freedom and allowed, in their music, to protect the integrity of the narrative.

Within this artistic and cultural context, Jan Swynnoe discusses at length such film scores as Bax’s *Oliver Twist*, RVW’s *49th Parallel* and Lord Berner’s *The Halfway House*. The book also examines the impact of the Second World War on British films and chronicles both the ‘decline of British cinema’ in the 1950s and the consequences of this decline for British film scores.

A fascinating book, strongly recommended to those members attracted to British film and to film music generally.

Stephen Connock

Concert Reviews

“Club Classical” at the Royal Festival Hall.

On 12 November 2002, the BBC Concert Orchestra performed the second in their new concert series, “Club Classical”, at the Royal Festival Hall, conducted by Nicholas Kok, and presented by Fiona Talkington of BBC Radio 3’s *Late Junction*. The series aims to present concerts of differing styles and fuse orchestral favourites with unfamiliar musical works. The result was a programme that catered for a wide range of musical tastes, with popular “Classics” such as Mendelssohn’s *Overture The Hebrides*, Albinoni’s *Adagio for Organ and Strings*, Fauré’s *Pavane*, Massenet’s “Méditation” from *Thaïs*, and Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, contrasting with a lesser known work by Duke Ellington called *The River*, and two contemporary pieces by Dave Heath, *Moroccan Fantasy* with saxophone soloist Simon Haram and the world premiere of *Rhapsody* (commissioned for the BBC Concert Orchestra for their 50th anniversary celebrations).

However, Nicola Loud’s stunning performance of Vaughan Williams’s *The Lark Ascending* proved to be the highlight of the concert. Her superb violin technique effectively portrayed the bird’s flight, gliding effortlessly across the strings and soaring into the upper registers. The BBC Concert Orchestra provided a warm and sensitive accompaniment that enabled Loud’s captivating performance to shine through.

The “Club Classical” concept of combining the “old” with the “new” is proving to be highly successful and further concerts are planned for the new year. It was a sheer delight to see Vaughan Williams included in the programme and hopefully this series will provide opportunities for his other (and lesser) well known works to be performed.

Lorna Gibson

Hugh the Drover at the Key Theatre, Peterborough, performed by Peterborough Opera, October 23rd, 2002



Live performances of RVW operas are, sadly, few and far between. According to the note in the programme for this presentation of *Hugh the Drover*, Peterborough Opera’s annual productions since 1970 (commencing with *The Magic Flute*), have included only two English operas, by Britten and Purcell.

Any opportunity to see one of these rare events must be seized. So when a flyer for this Peterborough performance appeared with my RVW Society Journal for October, I was on the telephone to them at once, and booked seats for my wife and myself. Neither of us knew anything at all about the company involved, or whether they would be up to putting on RVW’s ‘Ballad Opera’.

We need not have worried. This was an excellent production. The lead singers were almost invariably good. It is invidious to single out any for special praise, but I particularly liked Rodney Dawkins as Hugh, Marie Hayes as Mary, and especially Liz Williams who portrayed a very realistic Aunt Jane. The chorus was excellent, and the twenty-six piece orchestra quite up to the job, under the capable guidance of John Walmsley. The band was, incidentally, not situated in the usual pit, but behind a tall Cotswold stone wall (part of the scenery), on stage left. The rest of the scenery comprised the ‘Black Sheep’ pub and, next door, the

constable's house. Oh yes, and the village stocks on the left.

What a pleasure it was to see the action of this opera, rather than just listening to a recording (mine, incidentally, is the old LP with Robert Tear in the lead role). Prior to seeing the opera, I must admit to having had a sneaking sympathy for butcher John, having his intended wife stolen away by a total stranger. Now I am convinced that he got his just deserts. The John in this performance was well sung by Neil Smith, although he was far slimmer than the John I had always imagined. But he put on a convincing show in the well-staged boxing match, appearing in Act II with a real shiner around his right eye. As an aside (seeing the opera live stimulates further thoughts about the work) I now wonder even more whether Mary will find happiness in her new life as a youthful Napoleonic bag lady. Will she be discarded some time in the future, as seemingly happened to the Vagabond's lady friend in *Songs of Travel*? But we are not really supposed to imagine such things. This is clearly meant to be a 'happy ever after' story.

The performance brought to mind links with other RVW works that I had not noticed previously (or had forgotten). The church clock struck York (quoted at the start of *Pilgrim's Progress*). My wife was reminded of *Lark Ascending* by the dawn music at the start of Act 2. And the revelry in the 'Black Sheep' brought *Sir John in Love* to mind. Cotsall, by the way, must have been a drinkers' paradise. The revelry in the pub was going on whilst the watchman was calling 4 am! And all this next door to the constable's house. No doubt they had a special licence, its being May Eve.

Alan Carling made a splendidly cringing and lickspittle Turnkey. Playing the role in a shapeless sheepskin cap and an unkempt black wig, he reminded me for all the world of Baldrick in the *Blackadder* series. This is not meant as a criticism. It suited the role exactly.

Mention must also be made of the fourteen pupils of Eye Primary School (including two boys), who set the scene at the commencement with a dance around a maypole. And the Morris Dancers must not be forgotten. They had a busy evening, later appearing as a squad of rather young-looking soldiers. If John had been as strong as he was made out, he should easily have overcome them and run off somewhere. Perhaps he was resigned to his fate. The self same Morris Dancers-cum-soldiers had been first seen selling programmes outside the auditorium.

I had taken my LP insert so my wife and I could follow the libretto. I need not have bothered, the singers' diction and, no doubt, VW's scoring meant that every word could be heard.

This was the first night of four performances, and was attended by Ursula Vaughan Williams, who sat immediately behind us. I hope we can be forgiven for not recognising her at first when we sat down. She looked far too young! With the composer's widow present at such a spirited performance, in a gem of a theatre, it was a tremendous pity that the audience was so small. I hope that the residents of Peterborough and the surrounding area turned up in greater numbers on the subsequent evenings. If their absence was due to fear of an unfamiliar work, they missed a treat; and a tuneful one at that. I never fail to be puzzled that the opera going (or non-going!) public are happy to go to Britten operas but

not the infinitely more melodious Vaughan Williams ones. If this statement raises a few hackles I am totally unrepentant.

Our 130 mile round trip was well worth while. Bring on the next RVW opera!

Michael Gainsford

**The Pilgrim's Progress in Brisbane
Conservatorium Opera School & Orchestra
Conservatorium Theatre, Brisbane
For The Brisbane Festival
Final performance : 7.30pm Saturday 21 September**

It takes some time for the shock to subside at the opening of Vaughan Williams's "morality", as he called it at the time of its Covent Garden premiere in 1951.

In Michael Holt's stunning set, a traumatized businessman staggers from an all-too-familiar landscape, his body covered with soot and ash. Others emerge, equally distraught and dazed. We are at Ground Zero on September 11, 2001.

Wisely, in his third production of this generically difficult work, Joseph Ward has chosen to discard the fusty Cromwellian setting of John Bunyan's epic, retaining the language, transforming it into a parable for our time. For almost three hours, we accompany the Pilgrim who seeks a Celestial City of inner peace and self-realization, "in the similitude of a dream".

It is Vaughan Williams's glorious score which sustains us, lofty and ennobling. The Conservatorium Orchestra and Chorus provided a warm sweep of sound, despite conductor Michael Fulcher's perilously fast tempos and lack of a sense of architecture, pitching a tent where a Tudor cathedral was required.

As the Pilgrim, Shaun O'Brien held firm throughout, never lapsing into bathos or hysteria, although there was a harsh edge to his expressive tenor voice. Most memorable among the 36 secondary characters, John Peek transformed the doddering Lord Lechery into a prancing George Michael, bare bum shining through black leather chaps. The 48 young choristers relished being Studio 54 ravers far more than Red Cross rescuers at Ground Zero.

It was for this notorious Vanity Fair scene which opens Act 2 that Ursula Vaughan Williams created her litany of the crass values of commercialism. At curtain-time, the 92-year-old was escorted onto the stage to cheers and tears. By her presence, the compelling effectiveness and moving sincerity of this updating was stamped with the RVW imprimatur.

Vincent Plush

Editors Note:

A more detailed review by Donald Munro will be included in the June Journal

Letters

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

Scott of the Antarctic - Film Music

Having issued many fine recordings of RVW's music, Chandos Records are putting devotees of both this and classic British film music in an enormous debt with their projected three-disc survey of the composer's scores for this exacting medium.

With the first disc we now have an opportunity of hearing for the first time the full score which RVW wrote for *Scott of the Antarctic*. (It is interesting that at 41 minutes 12 seconds this is timed at almost exactly

the same length as the *Sinfonia Antartica*, at least in Haitink's recording.)

For me, this has been an absolute revelation: music of the highest quality, a lot of which never made it to the soundtrack. In this respect it is fascinating to read that RVW wrote much of the score before he had even read the script. It is both disarming and endearing that he hoped that 'one day a great film will be built up on the basis of music. The music will be written first and the film devised to accompany it.' It didn't (and perhaps couldn't) happen with Scott but the aspiration was an inspiring one.

I urge Society members to acquaint themselves with this music without delay. With so much film music nowadays that is merely mush it is salutary to hear what a truly great composer can do in this medium.

Michael Nelson



My wife and I hosted a 130th birthday party for RVW two weeks ago. The party was very enjoyable to us and was a big “hit” with all of the attendees. Our friends said this was the first time they had attended a party in honor of a composer’s birthday, but they agreed that it was an excellent idea. It was a beautiful clear, balmy autumn day here in California, and we set up tables both inside and outside on our patio. Some of the guests sat outside eating and talking until well after dark.

We played CDs of Vaughan Williams’s music all throughout the evening and we also had some live music-making and a brief lecture. We got as far as RVW and English Folksong before adjourning for a wonderful dinner prepared by my wife Elizabeth, which included brisket, buttered baked potatoes, autumn vegetables, and sweets from the local English food shop, and plenty of Bass ale. After dinner, the party was going so well that I abandoned plans to reconvene everyone and listen to recordings of the *Romanza* from the *Fifth Symphony* (one of the most sublime moments of 20th century orchestral music, in my opinion) and the end of *Sir John in Love*. I included in the written materials a brief listener’s guide to Vaughan Williams’s symphonies and other popular works, and also some information on the RVW Society. I also prominently displayed my half dozen or so copies of the *Journal*.



“Kerry and Elizabeth Lewis celebrating with their friends”.

People came and went at various times, so after dinner we collected everyone who was there at the time for the group shot. You can see the beautiful *Vision of Albion* poster in the background. It made an excellent conversation piece. The other photos show more detail of the RVW materials I assembled from scanned images, JPEG internet images, and enlargements of the commemorative note cards from Albion Music.

Our church choir director Barbara Day Turner – who makes her living conducting professional opera productions, musical theatre, and the local chamber orchestra – was impressed with our party theme and presentation. She said we will plan to have a Vaughan Williams Sunday at our church in the spring. Barbara’s husband Danielle Hilfgott directs professional and college level opera productions around the U.S. I asked him if he was aware of any recent productions of *Sir John in Love* or of other Vaughan Williams’s operas in the U.S. Sadly, he answered in the negative. Having listened several times to the Chandos recording of *Sir John in Love*, I am amazed and dismayed that this excellent and very “listenable” work is (apparently) not performed more.

Kerry Lewis

Hankies out

“Hankies out!” murmured a BBC3 presenter after he had announced the next song *Whither must I wander* from Vaughan Williams’s song cycle *Songs of Travel*.

Yes indeed, for amid this cycle of exquisitely beautiful songs, this simple Shropshire song can strike directly at a vein of nostalgia and sadness which most hearers can acknowledge, even if their childhoods were not the radiantly happy ones described in the song.

Dvorak’s *Songs my Mother taught me* and Tchaikovsky’s *None but the lonely heart* have a similar nostalgic power, not only through their words, but, I suggest, also by the melodic phrasing which rises and falls like human sighs, thus turning the body to the sentiment of the song.

But sentiment should not, and need not, give way to sentimentalities, and sighing, or a catch in the throat, would ruin a singer’s breath control. Thus singer and accompanist may make the best use of their technical skills to express the song, and safely leave the emotional response to the listener.

Helen Corkery

John Barbirolli and A Sea Symphony

Michael Kennedy, in the June 2002 issue of the *Journal*, doubts that Sir John Barbirolli ever conducted *A Sea Symphony*.

I heard the Hallé Orchestra, conducted by Sir John, perform *A Sea Symphony* in Exeter Cathedral in (I am almost certain) 1963. I still have the type-written sheet of the words from that performance, which was given to the audience, but which contains no date or mention of the orchestra or conductor.

It was the first time I had heard the work, which I found overwhelming, and the only time I have heard the Hallé (or Sir John) live. They did not, as far as I know, visit Exeter after that year; I do not know if they ever came in earlier years.

David Taylor

Folk Songs

I wonder whether you were aware that the book *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams* (originally published by Dent) has now been republished under a slightly different name.

It is now entitled *Bushes and Briars - Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams*. Published by Llanerch Press, Penbryn Lodge, Cribyn, Lampeter, Ceredigion SA48 7HQ, it is available from Veteran Mail Order, 44 Old Street, Haughley, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 3NX, price £11.99 (including P & P).

It contains words and music for 121 songs collected by RVW, with a brief note on each song. It also contains an Introduction dealing with RVW’s method of collecting folk songs and his achievement in that field. An appendix contains details (where available) of the original singers.

This is just a small percentage of all the songs that RVW collected, but the publication contains many not available elsewhere, and many that were not published in Vaughan Williams’s own arrangements.

Readers of the *Journal* may be interested to hear of this book.

Michael Gainsford

Music You Might Like

Heitor Villa-Lobos

by David Barker

You may feel that this is drawing a rather long bow: associating the grand old man of British music with the wild, colourful, exotic Brazilian, Heitor Villa-Lobos. I am certainly not saying that their music is exactly alike, but there are enough connections and similarities to make his symphonic output of more than passing interest to VW admirers.

Why do I make a connection between the two? Villa-Lobos was born in 1887, putting him the best part of a generation after VW. However, they died within twelve months of each other, and given that VW's important compositions began relatively late, their compositional careers overlap. Each had a significant French influence early in their musical development (VW with Ravel, V-L with Milhaud, a close friend from the latter's time in the French consulate in Brazil). Each adored Bach, yet were also interested in the new music of their times. Each was fascinated by, and spent much time researching, the folk music of their country, as well as incorporating that music into their own compositions.

Enough of the parallels. What about the music of Villa-Lobos? Those of you who only know him through the set of *Bachianas Brasileiras*, especially the famous No. 5 for soprano and eight cellos, will be surprised to know that he was a strong adherent to the European musical tradition of symphonies, concerti, string quartets etc. While Villa-Lobos did not employ the rigorous forms associated with these types of works, he was not alone in that.

His music is closer to late VW rather than the calm beauty of Symphonies 3 & 5, for example, or the grand English choral style of the *Sea Symphony*. There is extensive use of counterpoint, as you would expect from someone who studied the music of Bach.

The adjective most commonly associated with Villa-Lobo's music is "colourful", and sometimes it seems that this description is almost pejorative. What does "colourful" mean? A wide range of instruments, dramatic dynamic shifts, exotic harmonic transitions? All these you will find in the symphonies, but not at the expense of the music itself.

It is not just loud and fast with no structure: there are beautiful tunes (particularly in the slow movements) and he makes extensive use of the rondo form.

The twelve symphonies emerged in fits and starts: the first five were written between 1916 and 1920, but it would be more than twenty years before the next was written. If you are interested in dipping your toe into the symphonies, where to start? My suggestion is No. 4 of 1919. It is the middle work of a war trilogy with sub-titles of "War", "Victory" and "Peace". As you would expect from its title, it does feature much extravagant and exultant music, but the slow movement – a funeral march – is quite moving. Numbers 6 & 8 from the late 1940s are what made me think of this article because I did hear, in places, hints of VW. If you know the symphonies of Martin (possibly another column here), you will find some parallels with V-L.

We are very fortunate in living in the CD era for ready access to such buried treasures as the Villa-Lobos symphonies, being steadily recorded by the German label, cpo. Currently, four discs have been released (1 & 12: 999 568-2; 4 & 12: 999 525-2; 6 & 8: 999 517-2; 3 & 9: 999 712-2) under the baton of the American, Carl St Clair, at the helm of the SWR Stuttgart Radio SO. The recordings are vivid, energetic, clear, in short, all you could ask for. Koch International has also released a recording of the huge, wild choral symphony, No. 10 (3-7488-2), but I wouldn't recommend that as a starting point.

They have provided me with much pleasure, so hopefully they will do likewise for some of you. Try one: you might be surprised!

P.S. Following on from Jeffrey Davis's article on Joly Braga Santos (RVW Journal, June 2002), I have just heard the completion of the symphonic cycle on Marco Polo (8.225233) – Symphony No. 4 – and I can say without a shadow of doubt that it is the finest of the set. Truly one of the high points of tonal 20th century music.

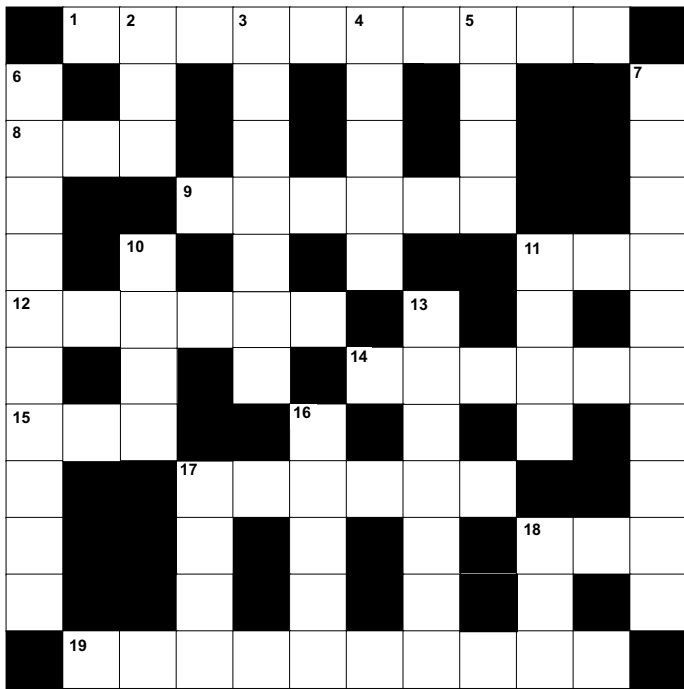
David Barker

A Special Flame

Book now! – Places are strictly limited!

All members are urged to book their places for the two day Symposium A Special Flame: The Music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. This takes place at the British Library, London, on 29/30 March 2003. A full programme and booking form are included in the Journal. Please support this symposium.

RVW Crossword No. 12 by Michael Gainsford



Across

1. No 152 in English Hymnal of 1906 (4,6)
8. Bricklayer's mate's equipment (3)
9. The gardener in a folk song from Newfoundland (6)
11. 2240 lb (3)
12. First of Three Choral Hymns of 1929 (6)
14. Rich carol of 1928? (6)
15. Hatchet (3)
17. The violin one dates from 1954 (6)
18. Godfrey gave the first performance of the Bucolic Suite (3)
19. No 641 in English Hymnal of 1906 (4,6)

Down

2. King Cole was this (3)
3. Near contemporary of RVW, from Denmark (7)
4. The incidental music for this Wessex dignitary dates from 1950 (5)
5. You would possibly wear Tarry Trousers if serving in this (4)
6. No 489 in Songs of Praise of 1931 (5,5)
7. One of three appearing in Pilgrim's Progress (Act I Sc 1) (7,3)
10. **** of France (Sussex Folk Songs, 1912) (4)
11. This was flowing in the third of the Five English Folk Songs of 1913 (4)
13. Cyril, the conductor of the first ever performance of The Poisoned Kiss (7)
16. Layered vegetable (5)
17. That of the Fifth Symphony's dedicatee resided at Tuonela (4)
18. Apollyon swore by his infernal one in Pilgrim's Progress (3)

From June 2003 the Journal will include two new features:

- A Centenary Celebration – a note on works written by RVW one hundred years ago
- A 'Swop Shop' page for your wants or surplus CDs, books, videos etc

*Contributions to Stephen Connock by
10 April 2003*

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**Answers
on Page
3**

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Papers**

The October 2003 edition of the Journal will report on the Elgar/Vaughan Williams Symposium held on 29/30 March 2003

*The deadline for
contributions is
10 August 2003*

Where possible could contributors supply their article on disk, along with a printed copy. This makes the production of the Journal much easier, and reduces the number of errors, as it saves the re-typing of contributions.

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