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EDITOR

Stephen Connock
(see address below)

A Special Flame

Over 160 delegates attended the joint RVW Society/Elgar Society Symposium held at the British Library on 29-30 March 2003. The Conference was an outstanding success. The high standard of presentations was set by Michael Kennedy who provided the opening address.

Influences

Michael Kennedy referred to Vaughan Williams's admiration for Elgar. He had loved the fifth variation in *Enigma* and spent hours studying the full score. He had written to Elgar for lessons in orchestration, being politely rebuffed by Elgar's wife who suggested Bantock instead. Despite this setback, Vaughan Williams had absorbed certain passages in Elgar's music such that they became part of himself. 'Thou art calling me' from *Gerontius* was the most significant of these influences, appearing in the finale of *A Sea Symphony*, the first movement of *A London Symphony* and in *Easter* from the *Five Mystical Songs.* Michael Kennedy added that the *Five Tudor Portraits,* suggested by Elgar for a possible setting, contained in the evocative 'Lament by Jane Scroop' reminiscences of the 'Angel's Farewell' from *Gerontius:* Vaughan Williams was less impressed with *Falstaff* and considered *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* 'patchy'.

Michael Kennedy (centre) with Andrew Neill (left) and Stephen Connock

Contrasting backgrounds

Michael Kennedy drew out the very different backgrounds of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Elgar was a Catholic from a lower middle class tradesman background who left school at 15. Musically self-taught he retained a sense of inferiority all his life, leading him to seek out honours as compensation. Vaughan Williams, from a social class that included both Darwins and Wedgwoods, went to public school followed by Cambridge University and then the RCM. He sought no honours, and refused a Knighthood. Yet from such differences sprang two giants of English music of the highest international quality.

With rue my heart is laden

Michael Kennedy's superb introduction was followed by sessions exploring all aspects of Elgar 's and Vaughan Williams's art. The Symposium welcomed Ursula Vaughan Williams and Evelyn Barbirolli as our special guests for lunch on Sunday 30th March – both in radiant form. Yet the Conference was to end sadly. Margaret Fotheringham, Trustee of the Elgar Birthplace, collapsed during the question and answer session and died shortly after. Our thoughts and prayers go to her husband, parents, friends and family at this terrible loss.

Michael Kennedy's essay will be included in full in the October issue of the Journal.

In this issue...

The Sixth Symphony

and more . . .

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A Personal Note

by Jeffrey Davis

"The violence of the Fourth Symphony and the visionary qualities of the Fifth are here wedded, and the result is one of the most disquieting works in the symphonic repertory"
James Day

The *Sixth Symphony* is Vaughan Williams's greatest symphony. Let me say at once that I realise that I may well be in a minority in expressing this view. Many would opt for symphonies 4 or 5 and the composer himself suggested that *A London Symphony* was his favourite (at least of the first eight symphonies). Michael Kennedy believes, I think, that *A Pastoral Symphony* is the composer's greatest symphony. Mrs Vaughan Williams wrote, in a letter to me, that she regarded the *Ninth Symphony* as "Ralph's most extraordinary work."

Let me also say that not being any kind of musicologist I would not begin to attempt any kind of musical analysis of this magnificent work. Such analyses can be found in the works of Michael Kennedy himself, James Day or Hugh Ottaway, to name a few.

So, what can I offer? Well, the *Sixth Symphony* has obsessed me since I first came across it at the age of sixteen or seventeen in 1972. I was lucky in that my early enthusiasm for the music of Vaughan Williams coincided with the celebrations for the composer's centenary in the same year and I was fortunate enough to attend the concert in the Festival Hall on 12th October 1972 where I heard Sir Adrian Boult conduct *Job* (the first time I heard the work), the *Eighth Symphony* and *On Wenlock Edge* (earlier that day, I had pestered my musical appreciation teacher to acknowledge the day in suitable fashion which he kindly did by playing us Boult's EMI LP of the *Fourth Symphony*). A few days later I was in Westminster Abbey to hear Sir Adrian conduct the *Fifth Symphony*.

However, before this I had picked up an LP of the *Sixth Symphony*, in its Decca Eclipse LP manifestation from W.H. Smith in Earls Court Road. Prior to this the only record I possessed of VW's music was Morton Gould and his Orchestra performing the *Tallis Fantasia, English Folksong Suite* and *Greensleeves Fantasia*.

Boult's Decca recording of this symphony was a revelation to me and I played it over and over again. I found it to be a most extraordinarily thought-provoking and powerful work (although I am embarrassed to admit that when I first played it, the volume of the last movement was so cut back that I thought that there was something wrong with the LP!). It is difficult, thirty years later, to recall the wide-eyed wonder of youth but the profound effect of this work encouraged me to save up for Boult's EMI boxed set of the symphonies and to branch out to discover VW's other music. Strange as it must sound, I recall feeling desolate that I could not write to the composer to tell him how much this music meant to me. Anyway, I did the next best thing and wrote to Mrs Vaughan Williams (care of OUP) instead.

I received, almost by return of post, a charming letter and a copy of "National Music and Other Essays" which Mrs Vaughan Williams inscribed to me (it remains a treasured possession to this day). I had also read an interview with Andre Previn, which appeared in a publication celebrating the Vaughan Williams centenary, in which he stated that "At the moment the young people are a bit impatient with conservatively sounding symphonies of this century…" As far as I was concerned, nothing could have been further from the truth and I pointed this out in my letter to Mrs Vaughan Williams.

I became so obsessed with the work that it even featured in one of my English Literature A level essays in reply to a question asking for a verdict on the appropriateness of a nineteenth century adaptation of *King Lear* that gave it a "happy ending". In my answer I commented that "giving *King Lear* a happy ending would be as appropriate as playing *The Flight of the Bumble-bee* at the end of Vaughan Williams's *Sixth Symphony*". My friends said that I was mad to do this but it was my best A level result!

Strangely enough I have always associated the work with the more bleakly magnificent aspects of the English countryside rather than with post-nuclear devastation or with Prospero's moving speech from *The Tempest*. The reason for this is probably because my old Decca Eclipse LP was one of a series that featured fine National Trust photographs of the countryside on the covers (I recall that Cumbria in the snow had to stand in for the Antarctic!). *No 6* featured a photo of Blae Tarn in the Lake District and I suspect that this influenced my thinking (coincidentally, this area features in a painting on the front of Kees Bakels's Naxos disc of the same symphony).

Since then, I have collected most of the subsequent recordings of the work and it has been great fun listening to them all again. I am very aware of the subjectivity of my choices in the CD review but I hope that they will at least encourage some response, even if it is one of violent disagreement!

Gloucester Cathedral reflected on clouds. Ursula Vaughan Williams believes this remarkable image was on Ralph's mind when composing the Epilogue to the *Sixth Symphony*.

An Historical Introduction: Origins, influences and "meaning" in Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony

by Jeffrey Davis

Vaughan Williams's *Sixth Symphony* was written between 1944-1947 and first performed at The Albert Hall, London in 1948 with Sir Adrian Boult conducting.

Vaughan Williams was well into his seventies and the violence of the work came as something of a shock after the underlying tranquillity of the *Fifth Symphony*. Some people apparently thought that having got the violence of the *Fourth Symphony* out of his system, Vaughan Williams was making a harmonious summing up and farewell in *Symphony No 5*. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The new symphony was extremely successful and rivalled Elgar's *First Symphony* in the large number of performances that it received in its first two years.

Although the work caused a considerable stir on its first appearance, there are antecedents in some of the composer's earlier works, especially the *String Quartet No. 2* of 1944 and in some of the film music of this period, especially the "Dead Man's Kit" episode from the *Story of a Flemish Farm* score and *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1946). Also, there are resonances of *Job*, *The Piano Concerto* and even, I would suggest, the finale of *A Sea Symphony*.

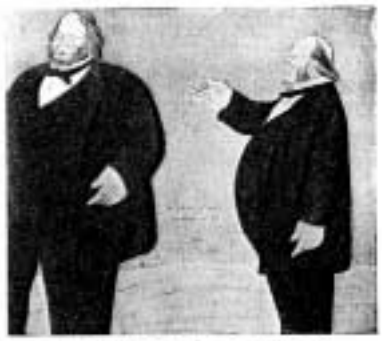
Of other composers, I think that Holst is the most obvious influence, especially *Egdon Heath* and *Saturn* and *Neptune* from *The Planets*. Symphonies by E J Moeran, Walton and Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* have also been cited as possible influences and there is an echo of the music of Sibelius, especially the *Fourth* and *Sixth Symphonies*. Another possible influence is the *Symphony No.3 Liturgique* by Arthur Honegger, which was completed in April 1946. Honegger, it is known was deeply depressed by the state of the world in the period after World War Two and his magnificent symphony conveys something of the disillusion and anxiety for the future that some listeners have detected in Vaughan Williams's contemporaneous work. Honegger's *Liturgique* also terminates in a deeply felt, hushed and wonderfully moving epilogue, although we do not find anything like Honegger's consoling and redemptive birdsong at the end of VW's *Sixth*. Of course, I have no idea if Vaughan Williams ever heard this work.

Despite these possible influences, the work remains one of astonishing originality.

The violence of the symphony and, in particular, the unprecedented nature of the disquieting finale, lead to all kinds of speculation as to the "meaning" of the work. In view of its post Hiroshima appearance, during the early part of the Cold War and shortly before the USSR developed their own nuclear bomb, there were various attempts to link the work with the state of war torn Europe and the threat of nuclear catastrophe. It was argued, for example, that in the Epilogue, Vaughan Williams was surveying the man made wreckage of a world laid waste by nuclear devastation.

Such an interpretation might be reflected in David Low's chilling contemporaneous cartoon of August 1945 "Baby Play with Nice Ball" (see illustration) or in Vaughan Williams's Charterhouse contemporary Max Beerbohm's "The Future as beheld by the 20th Century" (see illustration).

"BABY PLAY WITH NICE BALL!"



The Future as beheld by the 19th century.
Drawing by Max Beerbohm.

The Future as beheld by the 20th century.
Drawing by Max Beerbohm.

The composer himself would have none of this, stating to his friend Roy Douglas, for example, " I suppose it never occurs to these people that a man might just want to write a piece of music"

So at one extreme you have the composer whose only hint at the "meaning" of the last movement was a reference to *The Tempest* and Prospero's famous speech "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little lives are rounded by a sleep" implying that the mystery of death is at the heart of the epilogue.

At the other extreme are those who relate the work to the historical/political circumstances of its creation.

In his notes accompanying the Haitink EMI recording, Michael Kennedy refers to Malcolm Sargent's conviction that the *scherzo* of the Symphony "was all about a night in the war when a bomb hit the Café de Paris in London and blew Ken "Snakehips" Johnson and his West Indian Dance Orchestra and dozens of dancers into eternity."

In similar vein, a friend of mine, with tongue in cheek, informed me that the symphony is obviously about World War Two and that the reprise of the big tune at the end of the first movement clearly symbolizes Britain's role in the war!

Vaughan Williams was, of course, no "Ivory Tower" composer and believed very strongly that a composer must not work in isolation from the world around him. He also possessed a strong social conscience and his letters and other writings suggest that he reflected deeply on the great political events of his time. It is my contention therefore that the *Sixth Symphony* was undoubtedly influenced by the turmoil of world war followed by the uncertainties of the immediate post-war period but this is not to say that the symphony is "about" the war or anything else for that matter.

I am inclined to agree with Michael Hurd who suggests in his excellent *Great Composers* book on Vaughan Williams that:

For all its beauty and profundity, Vaughan Williams's music has a curious impersonal quality. The comparison with Elgar is instructive. Elgar looked inward at his own emotions, and drew his inspiration from them . . . On the contrary: Vaughan Williams looked outward and drew his inspiration from the world around him. Each of his symphonies is a comment on life as he saw it.

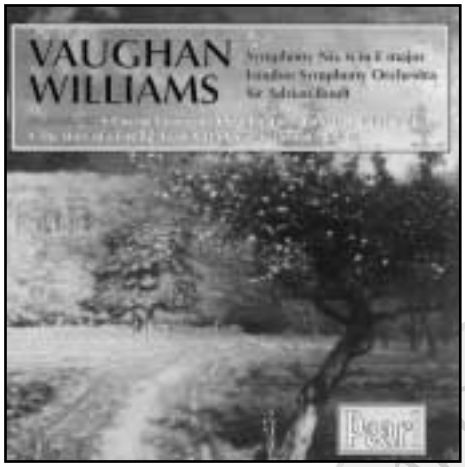
When I first encountered this symphony thirty years ago, as a seventeen year old, I remember thinking that I did feel that I understood what the epilogue meant even though it was not possible to articulate it in words. After all this is part of the wonder of music, that it reflects things that simply cannot be expressed in any other way . . .

Comparative CD Reviews

The very first recording of Vaughan Williams's *Sixth Symphony* came, surprisingly, from Leopold Stokowski with the New York Philharmonic and was recorded in 1949 two days before Boult's first recording. Since it has recently reappeared as part of Sony's super-budget Retrospective series it remains a desirable issue, especially as it is coupled with Dmitri Mitropolous's blistering performance of the *Fourth Symphony*. Stokowski conveys the excitement of first discovery and this is a powerful and gripping account. However the whole performance lasts only just over half an hour and the tempos are controversially fast in both the slow movements (Stokowski's second movement lasts only 6.51 minutes, compared with 10.16 in Boult's 1953 recording and the Epilogue only 8.37 as opposed to 12.51 in Abravel's Vanguard version although admittedly Abravel's is the longest of all the recordings).

Notwithstanding these reservations Stokowski's performance remains very exciting and at such a cheap price many Vaughan Williams admirers will want it as a supplement to their chosen version. The recording includes the original version of the *Scherzo*. Although the recording is now over fifty years old it has been effectively transferred in its latest CD manifestation.

Appearing shortly after Stokowski's pioneering account came the first of Sir Adrian Boult's three studio versions (there was also a briefly available BBC Radio Classics version that I have been unable to track down). This was recorded in 1949 with the London Symphony Orchestra and was reissued on CD by Dutton Labs in 2000. In many ways this is as toweringly magnificent a performance as the Decca version (reviewed below) although Boult is significantly faster in all four movements (maybe 78 side lengths had something to do with this). Nevertheless, this performance still seems exactly "right" without any sense of being rushed. In this sense it remains superior, in the *Epilogue*, to Stokowski. The tension is grippingly maintained throughout and the second movements relentlessly convey a sense of looming catastrophe. Another attraction of this CD is that it includes both the original and revised versions of the *Scherzo* third movement. However, it would probably have made more sense for Dutton to have included the original version in the performance of the complete symphony rather than the later version. Still, this is a minor reservation and you can programme your CD player to include the original version with the other three movements if you want to. This version is available at super-budget price and is attractively coupled with Jean Pougnet's wonderfully atmospheric performance of *The Lark Ascending* (a far preferable version than many more recent recordings) and the oddly moving rarity *A Song of Thanksgiving*. Don't be put off by the age of these recordings, as the transfers are excellent. Admittedly the string tone is a little thin in places but this remains a great CD and an essential addition to any self-respecting collection of Vaughan Williams's music.

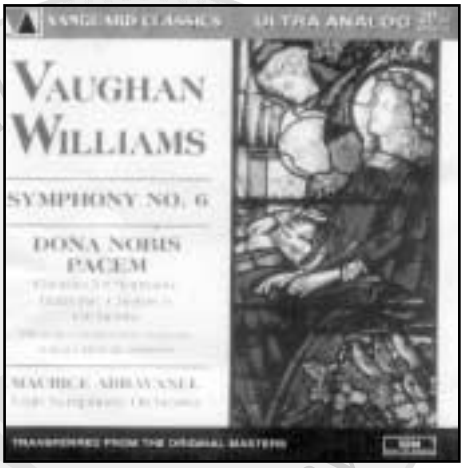


This performance (sensibly including the original version of the *Scherzo*) is also available on a fascinating Pearl CD coupled with extracts from original film soundtracks including *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (a fine score otherwise unavailable at the moment), *Scott of the Antarctic*, *Coastal Command*, *The Story of a Flemish Farm* and *49th Parallel*. The juxtaposition of the *Sixth Symphony* with the film music is not as bizarre as it might seem, in view of the echoes, in the symphony, of some of Vaughan Williams's film scores.

Sir Adrian Boult's second recording with the London Philharmonic Orchestra has recently been reissued as part of a Decca British Music Collection Box. I have to come clean and say that I have a very soft spot for this recording as it is, of course, the latest manifestation of my old Decca Eclipse LP. It was recorded in 1953 with the composer in the recording studio and another advantage of this issue is that it contains the voice of Vaughan Williams thanking Boult and the orchestra in a brief, charming speech at the end of the performance (I became so familiar with this version that, for a while, I found it difficult to hear the end of the symphony without expecting a familiar voice to say "I want to thank you, and your conductor….etc").

The performance is magnificent with the opening movement's second subject all the more moving for being slightly understated. The second movement builds up the tension inexorably, the third movement is suitably manic but the performance really comes into its own in the finale, the *Epilogue*. I don't think that any other performance conveys the "eerie progression through a bleak wasteland" (to use Gilbert Burnett's telling description) as effectively as does Boult in this performance. Vaughan Williams himself comments on the way in which the tension is sustained in this pianissimo last movement. I have never heard the last repeating chords sound so poignant as on this recording.

The Belart transfer was indifferent but the latest Decca digital remastering is much more successful. In a way this version would have been a better candidate for reissue in Decca's Legends series rather than Boult's fine but unexceptional performance of *Symphony No.8*.

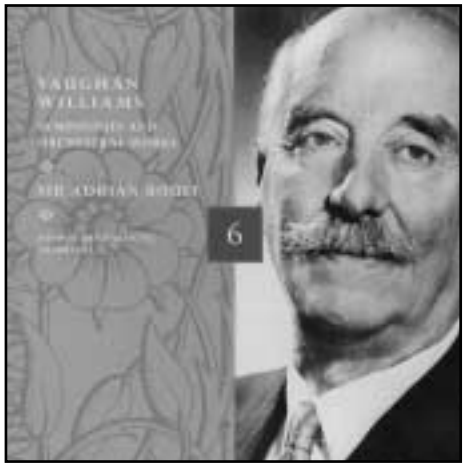


Of all the versions that I listened to for the first time in order to write this article, none gripped me so much as Maurice Abravel's Utah Symphony Orchestra recording on the American Vanguard label. To be quite frank, it

had me sitting on the edge of my seat with my mouth open. It is probably the most exciting recording that I have heard (the copy I have does not have a recording date on it but I expect that it is mid 60s, anyway, the recording quality is excellent). In particular, if the second movement maintains a unique sense of urgency and looming catastrophe, the third movement, in Abravel's performance, plunges us headlong into it. The slow pacing of the saxophone is just right, showing how well American orchestras can fully convey the terrifyingly manic jazzy rhythms of this movement.

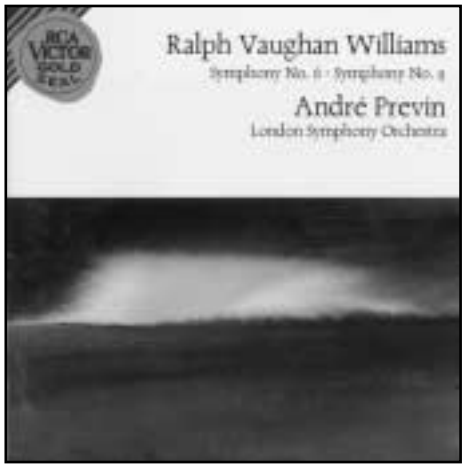
Abravel's performance of the *Epilogue* is the slowest on record (just under 13 minutes, the average speed is about 9 minutes) but it is one of the greatest. The tempo seems absolutely right and convinces me that most modern recordings take this movement much too quickly. If the big tune at the end of the first movement is given the full "Hollywood" treatment it sounds right in Abravel's overall conception. Do try to listen to this version if you possibly can.

One problem is that I am not sure that Abravel's recording has ever been available in the UK on CD. Its coupling, Abravel's pioneering version of *Dona Nobis Pacem* (a highly relevant work as I write) certainly has been, but coupled with *Flos Campi*, in another fine performance. I did locate Abravel's version of *No.6* on the Amazon Internet site (you have to look under *Dona Nobis Pacem*) but it appears to be currently unavailable which is a great pity. The combination of the *Sixth Symphony* and *Dona Nobis Pacem* is unique to this recording and makes it an even more attractive issue, as the works sit very well together.



Boult's 1968 version with the New Philharmonia Orchestra has tended to be damned with faint praise in reviews, where it is invariably compared unfavourably with his earlier Decca recording. The whole Boult EMI series has recently been issued as part of an attractively priced and packaged boxed set (containing, amongst other desirable performances, Boult's last recording of *Job* and Vronsky and Babin's epic performance of the *Concerto for Two Pianos*).

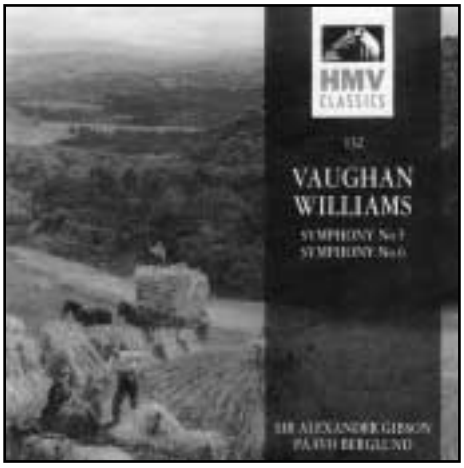
I believe that Boult's EMI set of the symphonies has been rather undervalued as I consider the versions of Nos. 2, 4, 7 and 9 to be amongst the finest available. True, this set may lack some of the visceral excitement of the earlier recordings which were, after all, made with the composer in the studio (or in the case of No. 9, recorded a few hours after his death). Nevertheless, these recordings convey a lifetime of experience with the Vaughan Williams symphonies and a maturity of vision which augur well for repeated listening. Only in the last movement (taken a little faster than in the Decca version is one made aware of a marginal diminishing of tension.)



Andre Previn's 1968 LSO performance on RCA was highly regarded in its day. It is a strong, finely played and eloquent version, the only reservation being the slightly fast and insufficiently hushed finale. I don't think that anyone would be disappointed with this, currently unavailable, recording but it does not carry quite the conviction of Abravel's or Boult's Decca account.

In my enthusiasm for this symphony I had often wondered what Sir John Barbirolli would have made of it and then to my surprise and delight Orfeo issued a recording of Barbirolli conducting the work in 1970 not long before his death. This is an extremely interesting issue as it is the only one, to my knowledge, by a European orchestra (The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra). Despite its incongruous coupling (Brahms *Symphony No.2*), this is a very desirable issue. I would go along with Andrew Achenbach here, who described the performance as "gaunt, big-boned…of memorable defiance" (Classics, December 1992).

Although I like the big tune at the end of the first movement to be understated, Barbirolli goes so far in the opposite direction here that it works magnificently (the tune is taken very slowly and invested with enormous dignity). Barbirolli screws up the tension with stark brutality in the second movement and there is some virtuoso saxophone work in the Scherzo. The performance conveys the excitement of a live recording and it sounds as if the Bavarian orchestra took the work to their hearts.



After the interest shown in Vaughan Williams during his centenary year of 1972, the later 1970s were a somewhat lean period for recording the symphonies, forming an interval between the early pioneers (Wood, Boult, Stokowski, Abravel and Previn) and the more recent recordings. One exception was Paavo Berglund who recorded the work for an EMI LP in 1975 with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. This version has only been briefly available (coupled with Sir Alexander Gibson's underrated performance of the *Fifth Symphony*) on the old series HMV Classics series. Of all the versions reviewed it is the one that most cries out for reissue. Berglund, unsurprisingly perhaps, finds a Sibelian epic grandeur in this work. Whilst it may not be the very greatest version available (or in this case unavailable) it has a slumbering power that is extremely satisfying. This performance has grown on me with repeated listening. The recording is excellent and Berglund sustains the tension in a finely paced and eloquent account, the sum of which is greater than the parts. I have been pestering Richard Abrams of EMI to reissue this performance but there are, as yet, no plans to do so, although I feel that there is a stronger argument for issuing this version rather than the earlier of the Vernon Handley recordings, which will be released (coupled with his first recording of *A London Symphony*) on CD in 2003 or 2004

Reviews of Bryden Thomson's 1988 Chandos version illustrates the subjectivity of choice!

Writing in the December 1992 edition of the much lamented Classics magazine, Andrew Achenbach described it as "soggy" and "washed-out", yet, interestingly in the BBC Music Magazine *Top 1000 CD Guide*, Calum MacDonald features it as his number one choice! Much as I respect Andrew Achenbach as a critic, I am more inclined to support the BBC choice. I think that Bryden Thomson is a seriously underrated conductor (his Walton *No. 1* is a terrific performance) and I liked his version very much. The second movement after a rather fast start, builds up to a truly menacing and exciting climax. Furthermore, unlike many other versions, Thomson eloquently sustains the frozen beauty of the *Finale* with great intensity. The slightly cavernous church recording adds to the atmosphere of a powerfully brooding and moving performance.

Leonard Slatkin is a conductor that I greatly admire (I attended a wonderful performance of Vaughan Williams's *Ninth Symphony* at the Proms a couple of years ago and his recording of this work on RCA is one of the very best versions). Therefore, his recording of *No.6*, made in 1990, came as a disappointment. It is simply too "safe"; there is nothing especially wrong with it but it undeniably lacks the relentless tension, especially in the first two movements, that we find, for example, in Abravel's electrifying Vanguard version.

Andrew Davis recorded the symphony for Teldec with the BBC Symphony Orchestra also in 1990 and this version has recently reappeared on a budget priced Ultima double CD. This is one of the best modern versions available and was greeted with much enthusiasm on its first appearance. The symphony opens with a much higher level of nervous tension than in many more recent versions (there are some brilliantly recorded base drum "thwacks") and this is sustained throughout the first movement. The culminating reprise of the second subject theme is all the more poignant for being slightly understated. Perhaps the second movement is not as balefully violent as in Abravel's performance but the scherzo whips up to a considerable frenzy only to collapse eloquently into the twilight world of the concluding *Epilogue*, through which Davis maintains the *pianissimo* superbly in a most moving and truly epic performance.

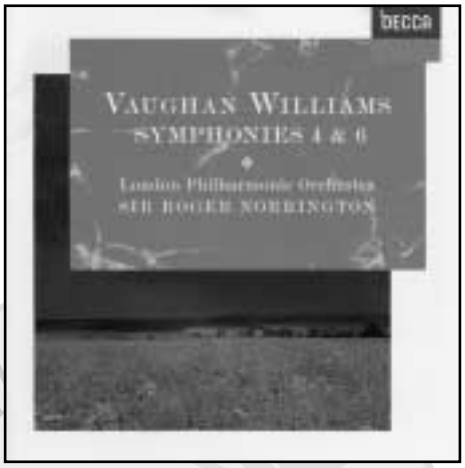
Sir Neville Marriner's 1992 account with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields was, if I remember correctly, greeted without great enthusiasm. I had never heard it before, but listening to it for the purposes of this article, I enjoyed it much more than anticipated. True, it does not compete with the very finest versions (Boult, Abravel, Berglund and Thomson) but it compares favourably with those of Slatkin, Norrington and Bakels. Marriner's is a thoughtful, coherent performance whose last movement conveys a sense of compassion that I had not detected elsewhere. If one is more used to a bleaker traversal of this extraordinary landscape, I still feel that the comparative warmth of Marriner's approach provides an equally valid and thought-provoking alternative. Is the last movement supposed to convey compassion, despair or both? Marriner's version made me wonder.

Kees Bakels 1993 Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra version on Naxos starts off unpromisingly with a distinct lack of dramatic tension and even the "big tune" at the end of the first movement sounds somewhat half-hearted. The second movement lacks bite and the *Scherzo* sounds routine, only in the *Finale* does the performance take off when the *Epilogue* achieves a level of inspiration that is singularly lacking in this version of the first three movements. In fact, Bakels sustains a cogent, unhurried and moving account of the last movement, one of the best of the more recent recordings of the *Epilogue*. A frustrating listening experience!

Rather better is Vernon Handley's recording from the same year (now available on the budget Classics for Pleasure label coupled, appropriately with *No. 9*, also in E Minor.) This is a good performance but not, in my opinion, a great one. Much as I admire this conductor, who has done so much to further the cause of British composers, I have always found his Royal Liverpool Philharmonic VW symphony series to be a little too "safe". Handley's version of the *Sixth Symphony* lacks the electrifying tension that one finds, for example, in the recordings by Abravel or in the earlier Boult performances. This is especially evident in the first movement. I should point out in fairness, however, that many reviewers rate this as a top version. (Handley's CFP recording of *Job* is an outstanding issue in every respect.)

In attempting to present Vaughan Williams as "a major international figure of twentieth-century music" I fear that Sir Roger Norrington, who recorded the work with the LPO in 1997, only succeeds in making the music sound strangely unidiomatic.

The performance starts off badly with the grinding opening dissonance sounding oddly laboured and too slow. In particular the second movement sounds extremely tame without real menace and the *Epilogue* lacks mystery. This is a pity, as I did enjoy Norrington's version of the *Fifth Symphony*.



Finally, we come to Haitink's 1997 EMI recording. This is without doubt one of the very best of the modern versions. Haitink had clearly thought long and hard before committing his interpretation to disc. Many years ago I heard him deliver a most cogent and thought-provoking performance of this symphony at the Royal Festival Hall and Haitink's perception is fully conveyed in this terrific version. Both the recording and the standard of orchestral playing are magnificent and Haitink's firm grip on the structure is never, unlike in some of his Shostakovich recordings, at the expense of drama or atmospheric tension. It is pleasing to conclude this survey with a recent recording

which fully conveys both the nobility, excitement and epic stature of this extraordinary symphony.

Recommendations

Despite the numerous recordings of this symphony, what struck me, during my listening marathon, was the relative paucity of entirely successful modern versions. Calum MacDonald points out in the BBC Guide to the Top 1000 Recordings that "command of the ardour, menace and baleful violence of the first three movements (Andrew Davis, Vernon Handley, Previn) doesn't guarantee ability to sustain the miasmic tension of the sphinx-like finale . . . (where) . . . iron discipline is needed . . . but Slatkin (like Kees Bakels on Naxos) seems to achieve it at the expense of the other movements' tensions." I would not agree with this verdict on Andrew Davis's recording but there is something to be said for this view.

My top recommendations are as follows:

Best Historic budget version: Boult's 1949 Dutton version (The Pearl issue of the identical performance is mid-price) although don't forget Stokowski's Sony Retrospective recent release.

Best modern budget version: Andrew Davis on Ultima or Vernon Handley on CFP

Best Premium priced recording: Haitink on EMI or Bryden Thomson on Chandos

Versions needing urgent reissue: Maurice Abravel on Vanguard and Paavo Berglund on HMV/EMI

Desert Island Choice: Sir Adrian Boult's 1953 Decca recording (only available as part of a boxed set of the complete symphonies).

List of reviewed Recordings of Vaughan Williams Symphony No.6 in E Minor.

Bold type = Highly Recommended Version.

1949 Leopold Stokowski NYPO Sony RET 011

1949 Sir Adrian Boult LSO Dutton CDPB 9703 (also available with film music on Pearl GEM 0107)

1953 Boult LPO Decca (boxed set) 473 241-2

1960s Abravel Utah Symphony Orchestra SVC-7

1968 Boult EMI (boxed set) 5 73924 2 (also on EMI CDM 764019-2)

1968 Andre Previn RCA 60588-2-RG

1970 Sir John Barbirolli Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra Orfeo C 265 921 B

1975 Paavo Berglund Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra HMV (old series) HMV 5 68800 2

1988 Bryden Thomson LSO Chandos CHAN 8740

1990 Leonard Slatkin Philharmonia Orchestra RD 60556

1990 Andrew Davis BBC Symphony Orchestra (reissued on Warner Apex super –budget CD 0927-49584-2)

1992 Neville Marriner Academy of St Martin Collins 12022

1993 Kees Bakels Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra Naxos 8.550733

1993 Vernon Handley RLPO CFP 7243 5 75312 2 1

1997 Sir Roger Norrington LPO Decca 458 658-2

1997 Bernard Haitink LPO EMI 5 56762 2

Sources and further reading:

Gilbert Burnett: Notes from Boult's Decca Eclipse LP of Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No.6*

George Colerick: *Romanticism and Melody* (Juventus 1995)

James Day: *Vaughan Williams* (OUP Master Musicians Series Third Edition 1998)

Roy Douglas: *Working with RVW* (OUP 1973)

Paul Holmes: *Vaughan Williams* (Illustrated Lives Series, Omnibus 1997)

Michael Hurd: *Vaughan Williams* (Great Composers Faber 1976)

Michael Jameson: *Ralph Vaughan Williams, An Essential Guide to His Life and Works* (Pavilion 1997)

Michael Kennedy: *The Works of Vaughan Williams* (OUP 1964)

And Notes from Haitink's EMI CD of Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No.6*

Sir David Low: *Years of Wrath* (Cartoon "Baby Play With Nice Ball" Victor Gollancz 1986)

Hugh Ottaway: *Vaughan Williams Symphonies* (BBC Music Guides 1972)

Denis Richards and Anthony Quick: *Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Max Beerbohm cartoon)

Ralph Vaughan Williams: *National Music and Other Essays* (OUP 1963)

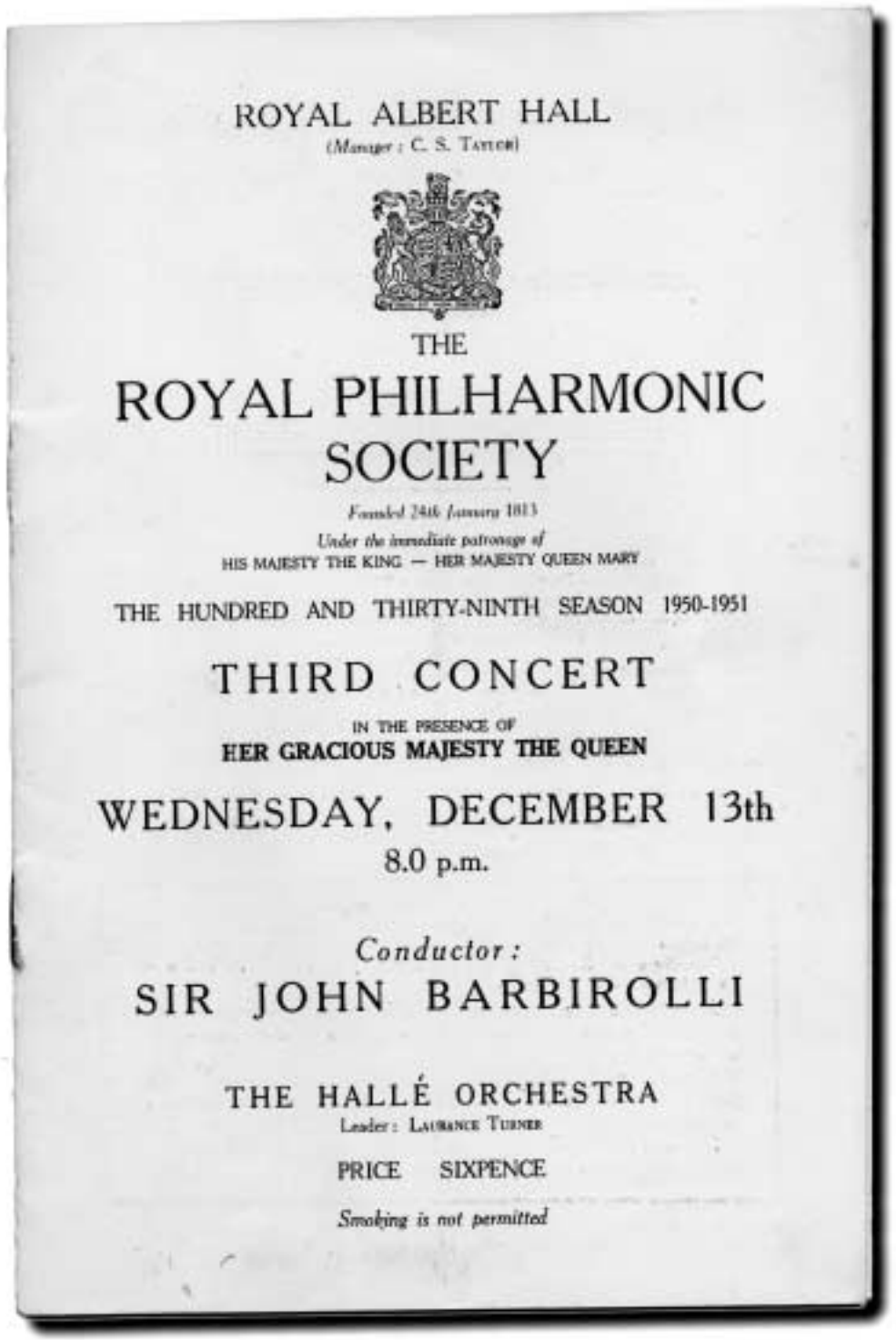
Ursula Vaughan Williams: *RVW* (OUP 1964)

Ralph Vaughan Williams O.M. *Guide to Centenary Year 1972*

Thanks to Stephen Connock and William Hedley for supplying copies of CD performances by Marriner, Previn and Slatkin.

RVW on his Symphony

Vaughan Williams's notes about his own works are characterised by brevity and a tongue-in-cheek lightness. This example, on his 'Sixth Symphony', taken from a programme note for the Royal Philharmonic Society of Wednesday 13 December, 1950, is no exception. It is reproduced here for those members who may not have read it. At this same concert, RVW presented the Gold Metal of the Royal Philharmonic Society to Sir John Barbirolli.



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8.0 p.m.

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THE HALLÉ ORCHESTRA

Leader: LAURANCE TURNER

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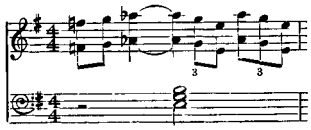
SYMPHONY No. 6, IN E MINOR - - *R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS*
(*Born* 1872)

This Symphony was begun probably about 1944 and finished in 1947. It is scored for full orchestra including Saxophone. There are four movements: Allegro, Moderato, Scherzo, and Epilogue. Each of the first three has its tail attached to the head of its neighbour.

First Movement—Allegro

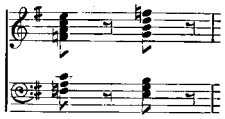
The Key of E minor is at once established through that of F minor, A flat becoming G sharp and sliding down to G natural at the half bar thus :—

Ex. 1



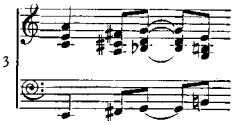
The last three notes of (1) are continued, rushing down and up again through all the keys for which there is time in two bars, all over a tonic pedal. Two detached chords

Ex. 2



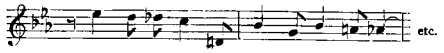
lead to a repetition of the opening bar, but this time the music remains in F minor and the rush up and down is in terms of the first phrase. While strings and wind remain busy over this the brass plays a passage which becomes important later on

Ex. 3



The fussy semiquavers continue in the bass while the treble has a new tune in the cognate key of C minor.

Ex. 4

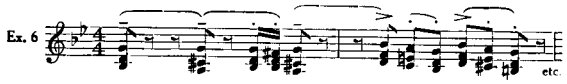


Then the position is reversed and the treble fusses while the bass has the tune. This leads us back to our tonic pedal and the instruments rush around as at the beginning. Thus ends the first section of the movement. The next section starts with this persistent rhythm :

Ex. 5

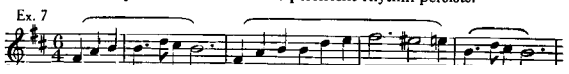
Over this trumpets, flutes and clarinets play a tune in cross-rhythm which starts thus

Ex. 6



This continues for a considerable time with some incidental references to Ex. 3 and is followed by a new tune while the persistent rhythm persists.

Ex. 7

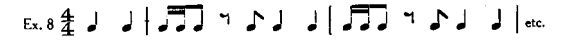


call, the " *reprise* in due course." As a matter of fact this *reprise* is only hinted at, just enough to show that this is a Symphony not a symphonic poem. But I am not sure that the " due course " is well and truly followed when we find the tune Ex. 7 played for yet a third time (this time in E major) quietly by the strings accompanied by harp chords. To make an end and just to show that after all the movement is in E minor, there is an enlargement of the opening bar.

Second Movement—Moderato

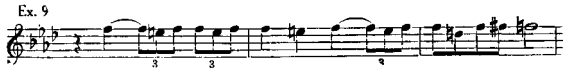
This leads on from the first movement without a break. The principal theme is based on this rhythm.

Ex. 8



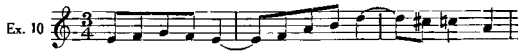
sometimes " straight " and sometimes in cross-rhythm. A flourish follows, first on the brass loud, then on the woodwind loud and then soft on the strings.

Ex. 9



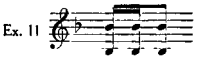
Between each repetition there is a unison passage for strings

Ex. 10



The strings continue softly, but before they have finished the trumpets enter with this figure taken from the opening theme

Ex. 11

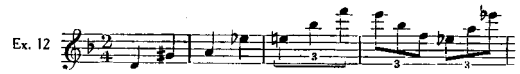


The trumpets start almost inaudibly, but they keep hammering away at their figure for over forty bars getting louder and louder. Meanwhile the rest of the Orchestra have been busy chiefly with the melody though not the rhythm of the opening theme. Having reached its climax the music dies down. The *Cor Anglais* plays a bit of Ex. 10 and this leads direct to the Third Movement.

Third Movement—Scherzo

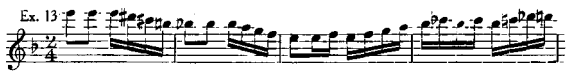
This may be possibly best described as fugal in texture but not in structure. The principal subject does not appear at the beginning. Various instruments make bad shots at it and after a bit it settles down as

Ex. 12



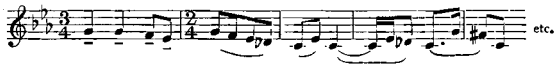
With this is combined a trivial little tune, chiefly on the higher woodwind.

Ex. 13



An episodical tune is played on the Saxophone and is repeated loud by the full orchestra.

Ex. 14



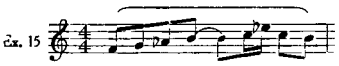
(Constant Lambert tells us that the only thing to do with a folk-tune is to play it soft and repeat it loud. This is not a folk tune but the same difficulty seems to crop up).

When the episode is over the woodwind experiment as to how the fugue subject will sound upside down but the brass are angry and insist on playing it the right way up, so for a bit the two go on together and to the delight of everyone including the composer the two versions fit, so there is nothing to do now but to continue, getting more excited till the episode tune comes back very loud and twice as slow. Then once more we hear the subject softly upside down and the Bass clarinet leads the way to the last movement.

Fourth Movement—Epilogue

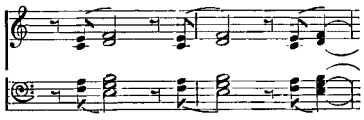
It is difficult to describe this movement analytically. It is directed to be played very soft throughout. The music drifts about contrapuntally with occasional whiffs of theme such as

Ex. 15



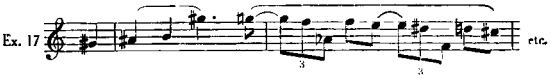
with one or two short episodes such as this, on the horns

Ex. 16



and this on the oboe

Ex. 17



At the very end the strings cannot make up their minds whether to finish in E flat major or E minor. They finally decide on E minor which is, after all, the home key.

The Composer wishes to acknowledge with thanks the help of Mr. Roy Douglas in preparing the orchestral score.

R. V. W.

The Sixth Symphony

Toward the Unknown Region
An Introduction to Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony

by A E F Dickinson

A E F Dickinson, in an article from *The Music Review* of 1948, sets RVW's *Sixth Symphony* in context before providing an analytical assessment. It is in style typical of A E F Dickinson's writing on RVW.

Toward the Unknown Region

An Introduction to Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony

BY

A. E. F. DICKINSON

ONCE more Vaughan Williams has written the symphony he wished to write. It would be unrealistic to take this freedom for granted. Negatively, the Symphony shows no demonstrable conformity with the heroic, optimistic, supra-personal and preferably nationalist art which the official representatives of the Russian people demand in their name of an accredited, registered composer: the work is, on the contrary, at once subjective and formalistic in many respects, however downright at times. No one can say we are officious about keeping our composers creatively alive, but if masterpieces are neglected or rejected in this country, it is not yet on the score of their ideological trend or uncompromising pursuit of pattern. Nevertheless, a heroic, ultimately triumphant symphony, in the G major of *A London Symphony* (first movement) in mood, would have roused the spirits of the victorious and defeated alike, especially in the United States, where minority views are not now generally honoured. Musical tradition is somewhat divided in this matter: the exultant final note of Brahms' first two symphonies, for example, was considerably reversed in the succeeding two. Yet the final confidence of Tchaikovsky's fifth is in the respectable company of Beethoven's and Sibelius', each reverberating in later and monumental works. "Go up to Ramoth Gilead". But now, as then, Micaiah would not minister to any false sense of security except in gentle irony. This view of the music calls for detailed comment later, but here we may note the composer's rejection of any unspoken plea for a "victory" symphony. He had, indeed, written a short but eloquent *Thanksgiving for Victory* for chorus and orchestra, showing that in 1945 he was far from lacking in intimations of hope and confidence, but not for a symphony.

Nor was there any vain attempt to outdo the fourth and fifth symphonies. To speak in this connexion of the "finest" symphony, as has been done, or again to utter the contrary opinion, is to compare what cannot properly be related. A symphony is either a coherent entity or it has failed to give the critical observer that impression, or only in certain movements. If it is complete and satisfactory in itself, conjecture may be passed on the breadth and depth of its content: we may notice that Mozart's G minor is finer and more penetrating in its texture than its predecessors, or that there is a larger measure of personality in Beethoven's D minor. But the intrinsic craftsmanship and sense of message of the other works need not on that account be disputed in their own right. The important thing is the sense of progress which every work of art gives, whether it happens to be the first or the forty-first of a series.

In this connexion a certain amount of irrelevant comment has been passed on Vaughan Williams' advancing years. Humanly speaking, listeners and performers are delighted that he has passed the three score and ten mark in full enjoyment of his musical faculties. The vital biological factor is that he has not only gone on composing in the last fifty years or so but gone on developing. This certainly cannot be taken for granted. One has only to recall the curious silence of Elgar in the last fifteen years of his life, and of Sibelius since the seventh Symphony of 1924, not to mention Rossini and apparently Weelkes. The venerable stamina of Verdi's creativeness is commonly quoted as an outstanding case on the other side; and it needs no Wagnerite to applaud the progress from *Aida* to *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Yet *Aida* is not a master-work of the calibre of the Mass in B minor or the *Choral* Symphony. Dismissing with regret, then, the achievement of Mozart and others as the developing genius of a tragically unfulfilled destiny, we are left with Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and (less certainly) Brahms as classic examples of the unquenchable spirit; Bach with his later fugues on top of the cantata output he had integrated in the Mass, Beethoven with his last six quartets, Brahms with the fourth Symphony and subsequent chamber-music, Wagner with all the variety and inspired unexpectancy of *Meistersinger*, *Tristan*, *The Ring* and *Parsifal*. By wide consent (and with due acknowledgment that Bach's fugal art is scantily appreciated) Beethoven's last period shows the most conspicuous and unpredictable expansion of mind from one work to another. Hence it is Beethoven whose stature has most been recollected in the consideration of the romantic otherness of Vaughan Williams' sixth Symphony. Whatever the parallel quoted, listener after listener has been aware of a historic continuity of utterance, of a creative activity that has been undaunted by the challenging quality of primary intimations.

The motive force of a modern composer's symphonic inheritance, and of the earlier Vaughan Williams symphonies in particular, must not, indeed, be lightly estimated. Behind the experimental and (to our Mozartian ears) often untidy patterns of the early *sinfonia* or overture one may discern an animating spirit in all the symphonies worthy of the name, even in the middle of the eighteenth century. Whether the formal trend is towards symmetrical binary or ternary structures or a wayward *fantasia* type of movement; whether the accent is on first or on second subject or on the balance of the two—it becomes apparent that themes are pursued here beyond their immediate sensation of melody or colour, and to some extent the structure arises out of theme or texture. Mozart's main contribution was to make theme and texture characteristic enough to grow naturally into a symphonic pattern, Beethoven's to build the structure out of his material, but the total effect was in one sense the same; the material acquired a new compulsion in its context, and the result was Symphony, the integration of all the known resources of sound-relationship on the widening basis made possible by the symphony habit at Vienna and Mannheim and elsewhere, and by its adoption on the part of a growing class of listener.

The next stages of the search for all-sufficient expression were concerned with the relationship of movements. In various ways Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt and Franck developed themes from movement to movement, most strikingly in motto-themes which set up cross-tension with the main material or mood of a movement and eventually overwhelmed all other impressions. Brahms, on the other hand, was mainly content to let the effect of his complicated but finely measured movements reverberate unconsciously on the classical plan. After this loosening of hard and fast distinctions between movements and a certain exhaustion of the technique of statement and development in persuasive symmetry or dialectic, the ear was prepared for the blend of different *tempi* which Sibelius applied to subjects in his second symphony, to two-movements-in-one in his fifth, and in his seventh to a whole symphony in one movement. Sibelius also worked out (under the influence, presumably, of Borodin, as Professor Abraham has often pointed out) a fresh method of thematic development as an occasional alternative to procedures which reflect the classical tradition.

A symphonist, then, is eminently a free composer, so long as his material develops into movements, and the movements lead to one another, or are complementary, or, after accumulating separately, converge finally in an epitome of them all. A composer may choose, roughly, between a sequence of independent movements, each a self-contained structure, and a blend of movements. There is a tradition behind either, and if either method is worked out freshly for what the material may be worth, the composer will be able to add authority to whatever liberties he takes.

Hence it is possible to speak not only of the normality but of the authentic note of Vaughan Williams' first five symphonies, different as they are in texture and structure. In *A Sea Symphony* (voices and orchestra) the composer naturally bases his music partly on the main development of the literary thought. Consequently both the first and last movements have a complicated shape, not to be justified as music pure and simple. We may note, however, for future reference that in the first movement the restatement is almost bluntly perfunctory and is concerned with the first subject, the other main subject having reached a concluding stage in the development (to the theme "Token of all brave sailors"). In the finale the first subject similarly approaches fulfilment in an early climax which proves to be the opening of "endless exploration", after which it would be absurd to return to the symbol of the vague vision which inspired the journey. Accordingly clue-themes from the first movement supply the necessary connective factors. Nevertheless, the second half of this finale is in the nature of an exploratory and well-nigh inexhaustible coda, shaping itself as it proceeds and incidentally rejecting the normal final cadence in favour of a transitional chord whose precise objective is left to the imagination. The obvious symmetry of the two comparatively conventional middle movements makes a strong and assured prelude to the structural adventure of the finale, and certain clue-references to the first movement bind these movements to the symphony as a whole. In point of tonality the four movements are positive, but almost unrelated—D, E and E flat, G minor and major, E flat.

In *A London Symphony* the arrangement of structures is somewhat similar, although the proportions are quite different. In the first movement the

pronounced reappearance of the main subject at the climax of the exposition (T in the score) is so forceful as to lend the movement an impression of being binary, not ternary; so that the subdued and muted restatement (after FF) is recognized as a trend, rather than a manifestation, not least by the composer. I find no difficulty myself in discerning a quiet but clear "click" at this point, after the cloistered antiphony that has gone before, but the music certainly does not settle down to recapitulate till the second subject returns, soft but unmuted. The latter is *poco animato:* the tempo oscillates from subject to subject. In the finale the main theme returns clearly enough but is soon absorbed in a coda which ranges from an increasing trenchancy to an epilogue of dissolution. Once again this occurs in the context of two symmetrical middle movements, but here the dissolution, for which the verbal sign is *niente*, begins to haunt the two preceding codas. The key-system, on the other hand, is hazy at times but shows a clear final integrity in G major. In thematic character the Symphony acquires its local habitation at a price: the strange episodes, stranger for example than the village-band suggestions in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, stretch the symphonic tether to a point that listeners of resolution and independence cannot quite accept. But as with Whitman's unconquerable sailors, there is an elation about London which springs from resilience and multiplicity of temperament, and this tribute to a city which will carry on serenely in desperate circumstances informs the hazardous symphonic course. Now, more than in 1913, it is realized that that tribute was an inspiration.

However, in his *Pastoral* Symphony Vaughan Williams went to the other extreme. A reflective mood in *moderato* style is predominant. Once again, and here almost inevitably, restatement is at first equivocal in the first movement. The lay-out of the others is clear enough, but the second transcends the conventional "unities" of tempo in a positively rhapsodic, timeless second subject; the scherzo dissolves in a mysterious coda, and the final vocal cadenza is a striking but to the rhythm-pursuer disturbing epitome of the basic plainsong from which the Symphony has bestirred itself. An outworn creed in "natural" intonations, inimical to worldly symphonic polish? Not outworn to Vaughan Williams, and in any case a profound revolt from, or rather a refusal of, melodic and rhythmic sophistication. Hence the measure-less themes, a challenge to symphonic construction, like the themes which are always changing metre. Hence also many neo-modal themes, chromatic to a point of keylessness. Development is thus signified in the first and last movements by a turn of *animato* or *rubato*, restatement by a relaxation to *molto moderato* or even *largamente*, to the equanimity of Adam and Eve in the early bliss of *Paradise Lost*; almost to the "German *adagio*" of Erda.

In the *Pastoral* Symphony the world and its incessant and jangling rhythms are kept out. In No. 4 in F minor the world which (whether we like it or not) is with us scarcely ceases for one moment to hammer at the ears of listeners, from near or far. The Symphony is a terrible but gripping indictment. Each movement is ground into moulds of unmistakable ternary or sonata-form type (the second subject *meno-mosso*, the development lightened into *animato*, in the first movement), and in addition the whole joinery is riveted with increasing intensity by its two clue-themes, one of the tightest possible chromatic compression around one note, the other forced unutterably apart from its starting-point. Trenchant harmony and general anti-tonality, continual contrapuntal stress and a forcible rhetoric, in which the brass is the characteristic group-tone, add to the high sense of tragedy, as Mr. Long has noted in a thoughtful article (*Monthly Musical Record*, June, 1947). A truly terrifying epilogue, which leaves *Le Sacre du Printemps* comfortably in the thrilling mythological past, squares the main account which the Symphony has set out to settle or rather to present. As artistic expression, it is indisputably forced as well as forcible. Its poetic justice is bound up with man's inhumanity to man, *Anno Domini* 1935. No other explanation of its warring nerves is adequate. Yet the symphonic logic, as opposed to the quality of emphasis, is musical from start to finish; more musical, for example, than the opening bars of the finale of the ninth Symphony.

By the same token of musical independence No. 5 in D bears no mark of the stresses and urgencies of 1942–3. If anything, the composer approached the Symphony from an unfinished opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, according to early announcements. The inexorable, documentary note had been sounded in good time in 1935 (and earlier, in a more remote way, in *Job*) and now it was too late or too early to challenge and warn. The mood of the fifth Symphony is essentially reflective and undramatic. The first movement replaces the cogencies of sonata-form by a leisurely ternary sequence of events: an *allegro* forms the interlude in a *moderato* movement propelled by complementary and derivative phrases rather than by any contrast of subject. (From the point of view of key, but scarcely of theme, a second subject may be predicated at 5 and near 13 in the score.) The stimulus of grinding rhythms and violently contrasted colours is replaced by spaciousness of vision.

The second movement is an obvious relief from the *Moderato*. As a scherzo-rondo its proportions are odd and disturbing, owing to the size of the first episode and the compression of the second, which has almost the same mental effect as the coda of the scherzo of *A London Symphony* as revised in 1919—an after-thought forced into a context in mysteriously austere circumstances. The *Lento* following will always be the general listener's favourite Vaughan Williams slow movement. It has a wider range than the *Lento* of the *Pastoral* Symphony, and is more concentrated than the wayward *Lento* of *A London Symphony*, whose opening it resembles in orchestral texture (tenor oboe and rich string harmony). Manifestly its consoling, redemptive tone is the very antithesis of the unhappy wanderings of the fourth Symphony *Andante*. Whatever the right descriptive details, the comparison may be pressed because there is a tendency to regard all Vaughan Williams' slow movements as alike. Structurally, the present *Lento* is built mainly on an alternation of *Lento* and *Più movimento* sections of varying length, but the main refrain, with its plain harmonic sequence, survives all diversions. The final *Moderato* has a single theme and a firm tonality, but its design is interesting and almost original. It builds up an exposition out of variations on and from a ground bass and associate melody, develops these symphonically, and then evokes from clue-references to the first movement a fresh transformation of the main melody by way of solemn epilogue. Here the nature of the main theme and exposition precludes any formal restatement. Brahms could only effect this in his fourth Symphony by using a *motif* sufficiently bare to indicate two stages of harmonic and textural elaboration as well as warmly coloured interludes—and an epilogue is inevitable. This one distinguishes itself from its predecessors by its final absorption in one plain phrase in simple diatonic polyphony, fit emblem of the perfect will reaching fulfilment. Bach's second E major fugue, Beethoven's late quartets (especially Op. 132, *Adagio*) and the composer's own Christmas Ballet seem to have contributed to this serene final experience. Symphonically speaking, one has to decide whether or not its anticipation of mood in the close of the *Lento* is a satisfactory relationship. The main fact is that, as in the fourth Symphony, the significance of the first movement, as complete and self-contained as the first part of a Dickens serial, is not brought home till the last movement is finished and the initial C in the bass is shown to be a leading-note, a solvent particle.

As I have already remarked, to adduce more than subjective preferences for one symphony or another is futile. Similarly, it is impossible to measure Vaughan Williams against Mahler or Sibelius or Shostakovich or Aaron Copland or whoever is regarded as a standard, except in so far as faulty craftsmanship or unrevealing content is observed to preponderate in a given movement or symphony. It can only be declared (by those who have studied the matter on a wide and reasonably scientific basis) that a composer has or has not maintained the authentic note of symphonic adventure. Some broad distinctions of manner may be observed in the case of Vaughan Williams. *A Sea Symphony* presents a polyphony of styles which resolves on the last by elimination rather than by inner compulsion; *A London Symphony* achieves a massive breadth and a deliberate conglomerateness which the *Pastoral* Symphony is concerned to do without; the F minor is consistently dissonant in almost every common sense of the word, and the D major restores consonance in like degree. Dialectically, the third and fourth symphonies are the most consistent, the fourth and sixth the most forcible, the fifth the most relaxed and spontaneous. The main fact is that in each symphony the problem of structural growth from raw material has been solved by education and imagination; and the lines of solution are capable of discussion and comparison, such as may be borne in mind while listening to the new Symphony.

The reader may have detected in this preliminary survey of the ground a concern for a more precise awareness of structure. Formalism has its dangers. It is fatuous to disqualify the structure of a symphonic movement because it has only one main subject, and somewhat perilous, on the other hand, to speak, as I have done, of sonata form in conditions of atonality which negative key-structure as the classical composers made it. But it is better to analyse and misconstrue a feature or two at first, than to remain so undecided about the order and relationship of events that discussion of their significance cannot properly begin. We may be sure that the construction of each movement was a point of expression to which the composer gave his first and last attention. Some attempt has been made here to condition the listener for the kind of discretion Vaughan Williams has exercised in the past in planning the main impressions of his symphonic writing. We have observed, for example, a "free" treatment of *tempo* as between first and second subject, a similar consideration of development as primarily or partly one of *tempo*, an artfully evasive approach to restatement, an occasional and exceptional use of contrapuntal methods or variation as means of exposition, and a fondness for epilogues which, short or long, at once sum up a symphony and transcend it. Contemporary outside influences are freely drawn upon, whether naturalistic, historical or local.

In some of these matters Vaughan Williams has been under the influence of the symphonic tradition from Wagenseil to Walton. In striking a contemporary note Vaughan Williams has, with whatever technical precedent, been himself. Without aspiring, like Mahler, to write symphonies to mirror the world, he has taken from common life and experience whatever he has thought worth preserving, initially from a deliberate wish to avoid being a mere cosmopolitan with no "home" background. Hence the approach to symphony from Whitman and an Atlantic liner, over and above any invitation from the Leeds Festival committee. The next symphony was about London ("by a Londoner", if the composer prefers the quibble): not only about London, city of fog and historic customs, but also the capital whose familiar clock-chimes became, as never before, household and often forbidden sounds in a distressed Europe, fit *arcana* for a musical documentary. By writing truly about the London he knew in 1913, the composer has been able to speak to millions to whom London is or has been a rallying-point of their life. The "pastoral" appeal of the third Symphony needs no recommendation, whether that disturbing

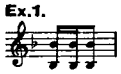
joy of elevated thoughts be approached by way of Wordsworth or personally and directly.

The F minor was contemporary in an immeasurably more urgent sense. It is not merely a reflection of the world's strife but a positive indictment. The very natural observations in *The Times*, after the first performance, of the "lovely texture of wandering counterpoints" in the slow movement, of a Scherzo "easily enjoyed by all and sundry", of the "new freedom of mood" and "brilliance of orchestration" of the finale, and in sum of the Symphony's "daring and gaiety", do not bear the test of repeated performance as an adequate survey of the Symphony's intentions. The loveliness and gaiety are seen to be pathetic incidents, the brilliance to be devilish. And historically the deduction *"post hoc, propter hoc"* is inescapable. Moreover, the downrightness of the indictment shows some contrast with the striking but much more incidental omens of mad destruction in Elgar's second Symphony. It is futile to *insist* that a symphony shall be a chain of sonorities, pure and simple. A great many fine symphonies have been so constructed, as far as one can tell, but there are exceptions that cannot be ignored. The *sinfonia* began as an operatic overture, in contact with real life at one remove, as the earliest music had been called into being in association with ritual song and dance. If Mozart left social satire out of his symphonies, his orchestra often spoke its language. Beethoven, who was more entitled to come to conclusions about absolute music than any other composer before or since, drew freely from his experience outside music for some of his symphonies. There may even be an occasion when pure music defies the time-spirit, represses the archetypes of social thought that the centuries have evolved (consider the formalistic music at the court of Louis XIV, paying fatal homage to *l'ancien régime*).

A composer may write music for the mere interest of its relationships or for their revealing associations. The listener who will not take the trouble to use more than his ears is just denying his birthright as an intelligent being. He is not maintaining a more artistic position than the listener who is prepared to judge what he hears by the side of his whole experience of life as it is. On the contrary, he is in danger of accepting or rejecting music which cannot be heard as sheer sonority. It is as well to clear our minds of aesthetic cant on this matter before lending our attention to the sixth Symphony.

For the first performance of No. 6 in E minor (Sir Adrian Boult and the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Philharmonic Society's concert at the Royal Albert Hall on 21st April, 1948) the composer himself provided a programme-note. Having informed his readers that the symphony was begun "probably about 1944", he took evident pleasure in reducing his alleged treatment of his melodic material (quoted) to a parody of descriptive analysis, enlivened by fussy semiquavers in the cognate key, the *reprise* in due course, and mock solemnities such as "the trumpets enter with this figure"—

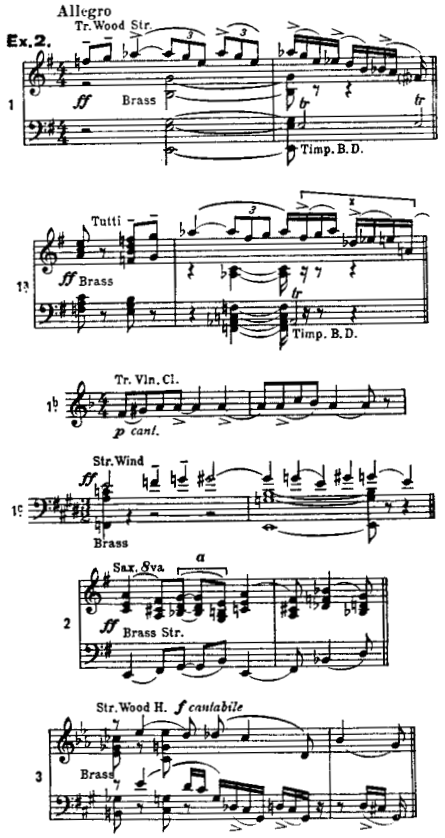
Ex.1.



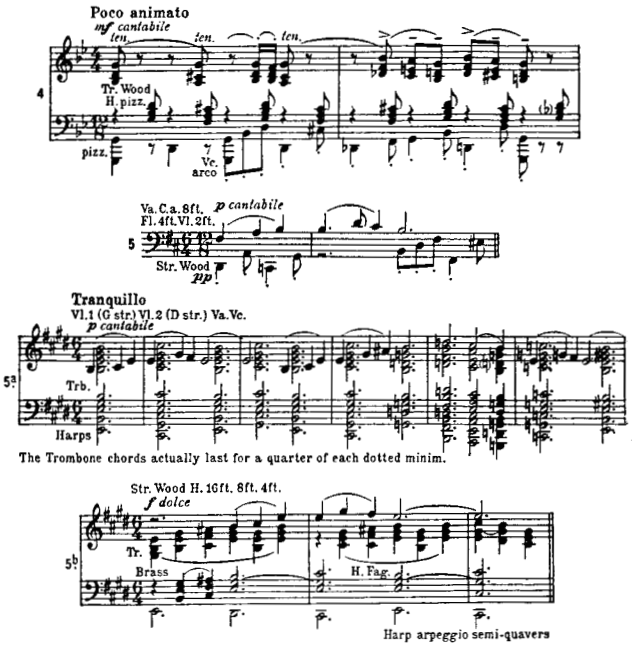
and "there is nothing to do now but continue. . . . Then once more we hear the subject softly upside down", and finally "They decide on E minor, which is after all the home key". I propose therefore to go into the question of treatment a little less evasively, and incidentally to try to convey some hint of the harmonic texture, which, as the composer well knows, is often of more significance than its melodic components and is the hardest thing to absorb accurately, especially in mechanical transmission.

The Symphony is planned in four self-contained but grammatically continuous movements. The first, very broadly in E minor, is an *Allegro* in more or less straightforward sonata form, compressed in the restatement. The second, approximately in B flat minor, proceeds from a main subject and auxiliary phrases, as in the *Lento* of the fifth Symphony, with a sensationally prolonged *crescendo* development of the figure quoted above in the background or foreground of the restatement. The third movement, mainly atonal but ending in F minor, is a fugal Scherzo with a plain Trio, whose tune forces its way into the coda. The last movement is completely an Epilogue (and is so entitled), in partly fugal, partly *coloratura* style, *piano* throughout, ending in E minor. A full orchestra includes wood-wind in threes, with a tenor saxophone in the first and third movements, giving place to a bass clarinet for the remainder of the Symphony (neither plays in the second movement), and there are three trumpets, full percussion, two harps (if possible), and a xylophone in the Scherzo.

The first movement is much the most orthodox in appearance, given a certain looseness of connexion in the second subject. The following are the initial phrases of the main material:*



* I wish to thank the Oxford University Press for the loan of the score and for permission to quote from it.

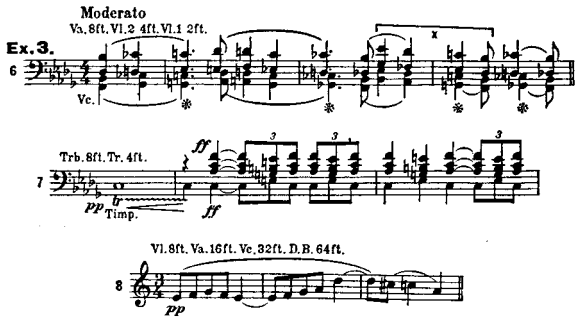


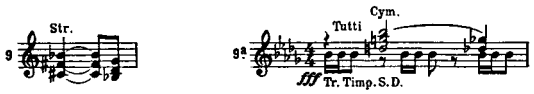
(The following abbreviations and other signs are used. STR. strings, | Pizz. plucked strings, | VIOL, violins, | Vı First Violins, | Va Viola, | Vc Violoncello, | D.B. double-bass; FL. flute, | OB. oboe, | C.A. tenor oboe, | CL. clarinet, | SAX. saxophone, | FAG bassoon; H. horn, | TR. trumpet, | TRB. trombones; S.D. side drum, | XYL. xylophone; TUTTI strings, wood and brass; 8 ft., played in the octave quoted; 4 ft., 2 ft., 1 ft., played 1,2,3 octaves higher than written; 16,32,64 ft., played 1,2,3 octaves lower: 8va, one octave higher.)

Examples 1 and 1*a* show the opening theme in two trends of tonality: 1 pulling F and A flat into line with E minor, 1*a* escaping into F minor—an obvious echo of the chromatic compression of the first clue-theme in the fourth Symphony. Ex. 2 will not be noticed except as a packed sequence of false relations of the type exploited in the G minor Mass. Nor will 3, the bass of which clearly proceeds from 1, etch itself readily on the mind. The reader-listener will appreciate the orchestral winking and blinking over the cognate key of C minor, followed by fragments of 1*a* (*x*). A change to a semi-jaunty $\frac{12}{8}$ and G minor (without F sharp and with C sharp) introduces a new and enigmatical element in 4, a quaint conceit, which may be described as "a swan of Maeander" (*cf.* setting of this phrase in the fourth of *Five Tudor Portraits*). It establishes its own mood of subdued animation, but proves to be a transitory figure, except for the rising minor third and $\frac{12}{8}$ background, which persists in 5, the real goal of the exposition. The latter is in a sedate B minor and major (the dominant) with a modal-chromatic tinge (*ra, m, fe, la, l*). At its first appearance it remains non-committal, except in its definite cadence, after which there is no need for any *animato* to indicate development. The change of key-centre is definitive enough.

Against a further flow of the $\frac{12}{8}$, Ex. 1*b* (D minor) may be distinguished. The composer refers this to 4, but I should have guessed it as 1 or a fresh phrase; 2 lends a hand and then a fist to the same episode, which brings in 5, in G modal minor, roundly in the brass with the $\frac{12}{8}$ continuing stertorously in the bass. The dismissal of this by 1*a* without any essential turn towards F minor, and the sequence of 2 and 3 (cognate key of B minor), adumbrate *reprise*. B emerges as a persistent dominant with its heart in the orthodox key-centre. The wind suggest E modal minor, but are immediately corrected by the strings to E major (5*a*) in an expansive setting, wafted perhaps "from yon twelve-winded sky" with an organic A sharp and a G natural along with G sharp to freshen the breath of tradition. Warned by the fourth Symphony, the listener will not be blamed for making the most of this serene passage and of its solemn repetition (5*b*), sealed by 1*c*, or for wondering considerably how far it is all meant—for that is the exciting quality of a symphony, to follow a mood into a wider context which it may overwhelm or by which it may be exposed. Later events justify a sceptical attitude.

"Modulate from E minor to B flat minor." The student who has learnt his Buck and all the casuistry of enharmonic transitions can welcome without affectation the blunt advice, "Put E in the bass, add B flat on top, and then take away the E, holding B flat; D flat can be established later". Significantly the trumpet (an almost mystical figure in the fifth Symphony) supplies the disintegrating B flat, the strings and lower wood play a low and reluctantly melodic refrain in unison, on what proves to be a pedal on the new tonic, and they are answered by the brass-wind. The grass has withered; and to the same key as the dirge in the German Requiem. The relentless *ta-fa-te* which appears at the points marked by asterisks in theme 6 below is at once "taken up" by kettledrums-cum-*pizzicato*, brass and muffled side-drum, and 6*x* is dwelt upon by wood and strings. By way of interlude two other motives, a formal fanfare of revolving chords of the sixth and a mysterious string unison phrase in the Phrygian mode (plus C sharp and B flat), are developed in a variety of string or wind textures, antiphonally at first and eventually in parallel. The falling third of the second motive is emphasized in a trochaic figure which harmonically recalls 2*a*. This leaves a hangover of 6 (tune and pedal), 7, 8 and 9; and all that remains is to attend more to it. But the string harmony of 6 inaugurates a restatement which far exceeds in intensity, for example, the formal gloom of the Brahms chorus to which allusion has been made. It is a summons that cannot be denied. Nor is there any room for doubting the music's portent in 1948. Intimations of reconciliation and reconstructive effort had been delivered by the composer in 1945 in *Thanksgiving for Victory*, preceded by the fifth Symphony. Now, behind more iron curtains than one, the "archetypes" of different collective unconsciousnesses, or (in the simpler language of the education office) the trends, once again challenge the disciplined will of men of resolution and independence. The message of the relentless trumpet-drum reiterations, which reach a final penetration in the fundamental

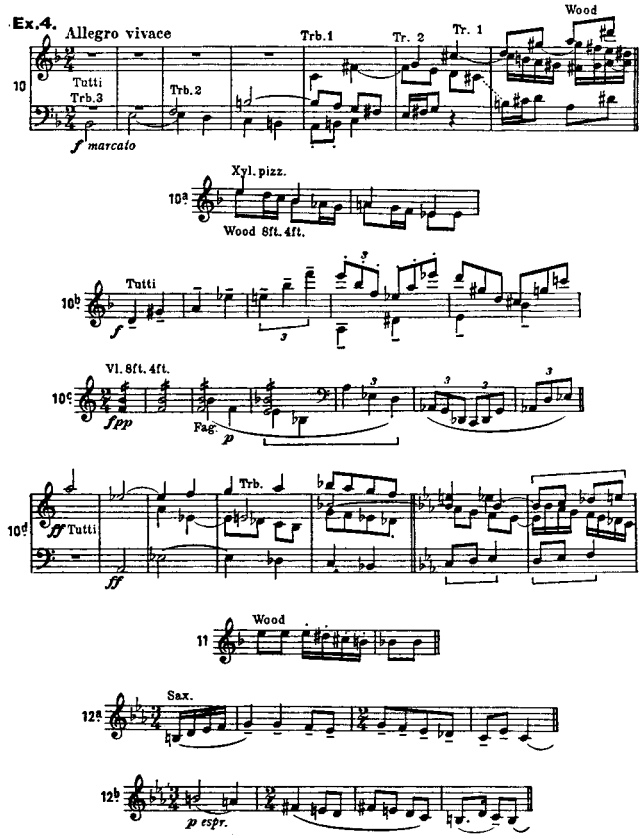




and crashing falsity of 9 (Ex. 9*a* above) is, except to the wilfully or pitifully blind, that of a scorching mirror. Here the inevitable tenor oboe must interpose (with a chromatic suggestion of 8) with 7 echoing in the lower strings. The oboe is left to maintain divided attention between C flat and B flat against the percussion (drums and *pizzicato*).

Decision having fallen on B flat, an energetic fugue on a taut, almost torturous subject forms the main section of a Scherzo, with a comparatively tuneful Trio flying off at a tangent from it, but later, in portentous augmentation, bestriding (not without *folie de grandeur*) the culminating point of the second bout of fugal development. The quotations below indicate the fugue's quick resourcefulness on partly traditional but ultimately independent lines, along with episodic material. Inversion, diminution and augmentation are all employed in the thematic "discussion", but as in most examples of the comparatively small number of Bach's fugues which exploit these devices, the general impression is of infectious material and varied repartee, not of a studiously wrought pyramid of sound. The sixth fugue of *The Art of Fugue* is the obvious parallel, apart from questions of texture.

The opening bars (10 above) show close entries and diminution of the initial subject in the first and (bar 7) second degree, giving an effect of compressed thought, from which 11, "a trivial little tune" (R. V. W.), provides diversion. However, just as in the *Cockaigne* overture it is the cheerful, street-boy diminution of the second theme which soon sounds the normal version, so that the original becomes as good as an augmentation; so here the first diminution (bar 5) soon becomes the normal measure and will be so regarded in subsequent references. (It is essential to be clear on one point: the original subject stretches *up*.) No. 10*a* is thus heard as a plain inversion, with its descending intervals filled in by a rhythmic figure. No. 10*b*, which the composer describes rather arbitrarily as "the real subject" at which the



orchestra have previously made "bad shots", is similarly an expansion of the normal subject by the addition of figures derived by diminution and inversion. After this the downward intervals of 10*a* are heard against the diminished subject in the bass, followed by augmentation off the main beat, a massive brake on the main rhythm (from 7 to 8 in the score). No. 11 subsequently

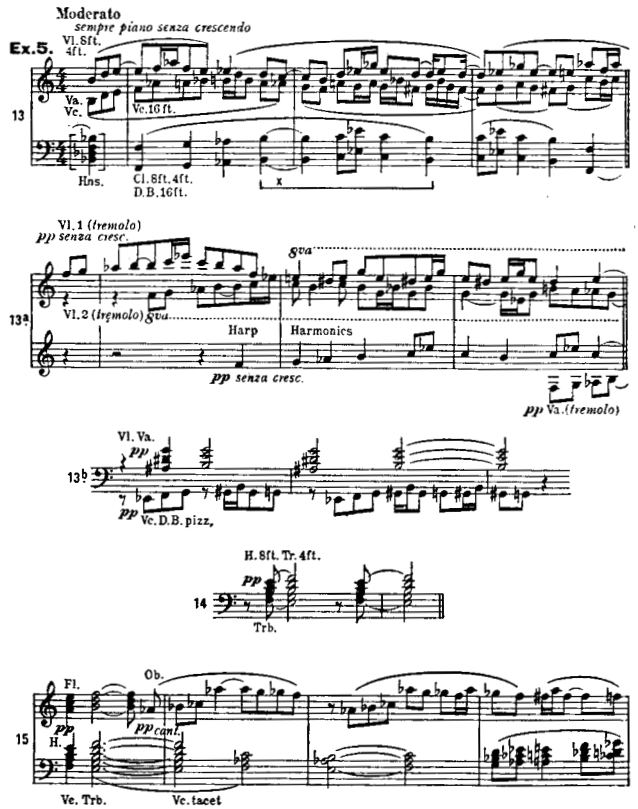
be conceived as described and then heard as part of the music. The general impression, then, of the chain of incidents which have been detailed is of trenchant and resourceful invention, melodically always taut and rhythmically often close-knit and perhaps knotted. There is a distinct reverberation of the fourth Symphony, not only in the contrapuntal quality of the sound but also in the acuteness of melody and harmony. The warning note of the slow movement looms over all, for those who have developed the symphony habit to any point of cultivation.

After this the Symphony parts company with its predecessors and indeed with all other symphonies. The last movement is an extended epilogue. There is no question of balancing the first or third with the fourth. Consideration of a few precedents is suggestive. In *A Sea Symphony* the great voyage which occupies the second part of the finale is in a sense an epilogue, an almost independent section; and it ends in mystery. In *A London Symphony* the epilogue idea is briefly carried out after a normal but compressed finale. In the *Pastoral* Symphony the finale begins and ends with a plainsong so remote from common symphonic movement as to sound detached even from this characteristically leisurely work. The conclusion of the fifth Symphony is likewise a transformation of the preceding matter. We may also compare the end of Sibelius' fourth Symphony. There is, further, the *Grosse Fuge* with which Beethoven originally ended the Quartet, Op. 130, presumably as the converging point of the previous five movements as a whole, certainly not as the sequel of the *Cavatina*. Similar in detachment is the fugal opening of the Quartet, Op. 131.

Assume, then, that the previous movements of the sixth Symphony have expended themselves: the listener owes them nothing. Yet some intimations remain, in no audible relation (unless No. 14 below recalls 1*a*) but the conclusion of the whole matter. A fugal theme can be discerned—of which the bass of 13 is the augmentation. Its developments include 13, an earlier function of which 13*a* (figure 9) is a metrical variation, 13 with 13*x*, and 13*b*. A cadence (14) punctuates these contrapuntal exercises, and an oboe phrase (15) supplies interludes. A second stage thus begins with 13*a* (fig. 9), followed by 14, 13 with *x*, 15 and 13*b*, an obvious echo of the end of *A Sea Symphony*. The strings and brass are muted throughout, and all instruments are directed to play *p* or *pp* without *crescendo*.

Few can pretend they have *heard* all this movement. It will take time, even when its real sense of consequence is clearer, to assimilate it as one has assimilated the end of the *Jupiter* ("Neptune" would be much nearer!). Meanwhile, I for one shall go on trying.

Until that differential is integrated, it is not easy to make up one's mind on the general coherence of the Symphony. The structural urge of each movement is clear enough, and the unusually dramatic slow movement clears the mind of all vain and false sentiment and prepares it for new journeys in strange worlds. One thing is certain: here, if anywhere, Vaughan Williams has written the Symphony he wished to write. There has been no miscalculation about that last impression. The failure of less sensitive or possibly less imaginative musicians to respond is of small consequence. It is no idle fancy to see in this finale the deepest fulfilment of the fresh step forward which the composer first took in the work not unhappily named *Toward the unknown region*. There are, after all, other archetypes of thought and feeling than the aggressive or the disciplinary about the world as it is—and the slow movement and in part the Scherzo seem uncompromisingly enough to face the hates and fears and



lies which lie about the path of the best intentioned as far as thought can reach. Intimations of hard, unshakable contemplation of things in themselves are the concern of music. No symphony (it has now been shown) and no sense of world-crisis can keep them out, and in determining to what the struggles of the previous three movements point, this epilogue may well symbolise a more penetrating reflection on our tragical discontents than an eloquent emotional tensity.

Crossword Solutions:

Across:

1. As I walked out, 7. Shining ones, 10. Gray, 13. Sic, 15. Rue, 16. Wasp, 19. Butterworth, 24. Mummers' Carol

Down:

1. Alister, 2. Lion, 3. Echo, 4. OM, 5. Tar, 6. Dirge, 8. GB, 11. AD (Anton Dolin), 12. La, 13. Spurn, 14. Coghill, 17. OT (Old Testament), 18 Te, 20. Toye, 21. Raps, 22. Ram, 23. MM (Muir Mathieson).

The Holst Memorial Symphony?

by Paul Sarcich

This is a speculative essay, founded in an instinctive feeling that a large part of the nature of this symphony, which puzzled listeners on its appearance and still today is the subject of debate, may be explained by a consideration of RVW's relationship with Gustav Holst. This relationship, after all, was one virtually unprecedented in the history of music. Composers usually operate as solitary beings, but Holst and RVW, since their student days and right up to the time of Holst's death, had had regular "field days", where they showed each other their works-in-progress and subjected each other to rigorous but constructive criticism.

RVW's trepidation at these events is recorded: ". . . sometimes I could not face the absolute integrity of his vision, and I hid some of my worst crimes from him" [i] and indeed Holst, who in later life particularly was prone to paring his own works to the very core, must have been a formidable scrutineer of RVW's more expansive efforts. It is significant that Holst was no symphonist himself, and his number of truly large-scale works is few, so RVW must have been subjected to some searching comment. What is also clear though, is that RVW never doubted the benefit of these sessions together. "My only thought now whichever way I turn, whatever are we to do without him . . ."[ii] as he wrote to Isobel and Imogen at the news of Holst's death in 1934.

That year is the first point to which I would like to draw attention. 1934 was a particularly bad year for English music, as three of its most significant composers – Holst, Elgar and Delius – all died. According to RVW's own programme note for the *Sixth Symphony*, he began it "probably in 1944". To this author at any rate, the "probably" is rather coy, but typical of RVW's personal emotional reticence. In the extremely difficult circumstances of 1944 there was doubtless no time or space to think of a 10th anniversary commemoration for any of these great contributors to English music, but surely in that year, RVW of all people must have felt that a memorium of his great friend and musical confidant, the man with whom he had set about the renaissance of English music no less, might be in order.

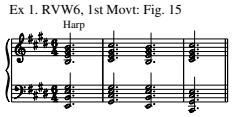
Michael Kennedy comments on this idea: "He wrote no music *in memoriam*. That was not his way. But in the next twenty five years he wrote several works, the *Sixth Symphony* among them, in which his old friend's influence still seems to be discernable" [iii]

Kennedy thus singles out the *Sixth* from an entire quarter-century of work as "Holstian" in some way, while denying any specific memorial work. But Kennedy also makes specific comparisons, with his comments about RVW's second movement ostinato containing a ". . . three-note trumpet figure, which is a crib from Holst's *Mars*"[iv] , and the Epilogue ". . . inhabiting the atmosphere of Holst's *Neptune* . . . "[v] and possessing the same " . . . cold impersonal splendour of the universe . . ."[vi]

The apparent contradictions here might be resolved if we entertain the thought that, while RVW would not make any conscious and/or public statements *in memoriam* to Holst, this did not prevent him unconsciously and/or privately doing exactly that.

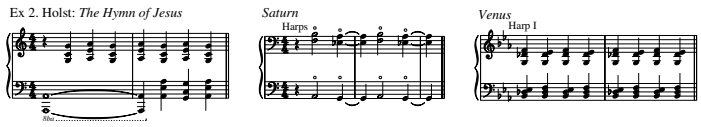
The atmospheric similarities pointed out by Kennedy will be obvious to any listener who knows both the *Sixth Symphony* and *The Planets*. To dig deeper, we must reconsider the close relationship outlined above, where these two men had worked side-by-side for a long period to try to create a truly English music, founded in their joint rediscovery of folksong, Tudor music and plainsong. It would not be surprising to find that they had evolved a kind of "common currency" in this process, certain devices and compositional traits which would appear in both their works. To give but one simple example, the device of chords swaying in seconds. The "big tune" in the first movement of RWV6 is set on a harp figure:

Ex 1. RVW6, 1st Movt: Fig. 15



Rocking seconds will also be familiar to RVW listeners from the opening bars of *Songs of Travel*, where they represent the plod of the Traveller's boots. But Holst was also an ardent user of the swaying second:

Ex 2. Holst: *The Hymn of Jesus* — *Saturn* — *Venus*

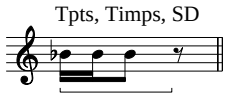


Examples of other such similarities are dotted throughout both composers' works, to the extent that it is rather pointless to worry about who might have been cribbing what from whom.

Given some common vocabulary then, the question becomes one of whether RVW's *Sixth* shows any sign above this commonality of being particularly directed to the memory of Holst. In the examples I present, I am well aware of their speculative nature – after all, it is impossible to know the mind of a long-dead composer – but at the very least, I hope to show a case of "great minds thinking alike."

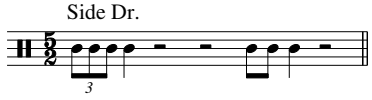
To return to Kennedy's comments, they are slightly misleading in the case of the ostinato, as it is not actually the ostinato itself which is the crib. RVW's second movement ostinato is a three-quaver unit:

Ex 3: RVW6, 2nd movt.



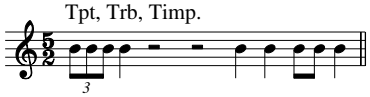
which, failing to fit into an eight-quaver bar, drifts across beats and barlines until it renews the cycle every three bars. Holst's ostinato from the central section of *Mars* is quite regular though, beginning on the side drum alone:

Ex.4: *Mars,* Fig. VI



then expanding to

Ex.5: *Mars*

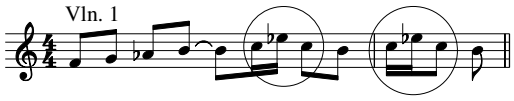


The crib lies more in the orchestration: RVW uses the side drum, timpani and brass in close imitation of Holst. The result for the listener is the same desiccated, stuttering machine-gun like effect, the close similarity in the scoring creating an immediate association for those who know both works.

But perhaps the most telling question to be asked here is, why is the ostinato there at all in the symphony? The use of ostinati like these is a Holst thumbprint (*The Planets, The Hymn of Jesus, Choral Fantasia, Ode to Death* etc) but quite atypical of RVW. The fact that RVW, who did not normally indulge in relentless ostinato in the Holstian manner, used a texture like this at all, let alone in such blatant imitation of Holst's scoring, might awaken our suspicions.

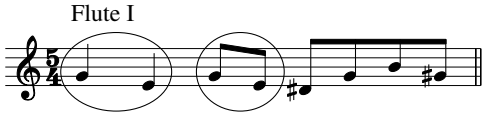
Then there is the Epilogue of the symphony - allied to *Neptune* in mood and atmosphere certainly (the unvarying pianissimo dynamics, muted string sound, expressionless playing and spaciousness in the scoring), but in any closer way? Here is RVW's opening string figure:

Ex. 6: RVW6, Epilogue



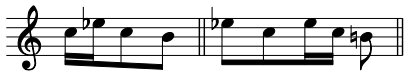
and Holst's flute opening to *Neptune*

Ex.7: *Neptune*



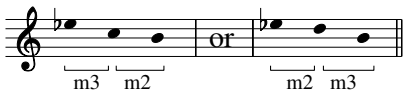
What attracts the listener's ear in both cases are the repeated minor thirds (circled) – rising in RVW, falling in Holst. Keeping the relative note values of Holst's music, but raising the pitch level to that of the RVW example, we have two cells

Ex. 8: RVW Holst



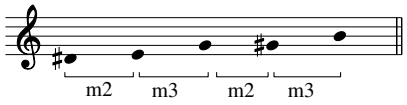
which bear a startling resemblance to each other. If not siblings, they are certainly cousins. Indeed, one of the principal building blocks of the whole of RVW6 is the cell formed by the intervals of minor 2nd and 3rd, in either order:

Ex. 9



Holst's opening to Neptune is actually formed from the juxtaposition of the chords of E minor and G# minor, but if those notes are laid out as a scale:

Ex. 10

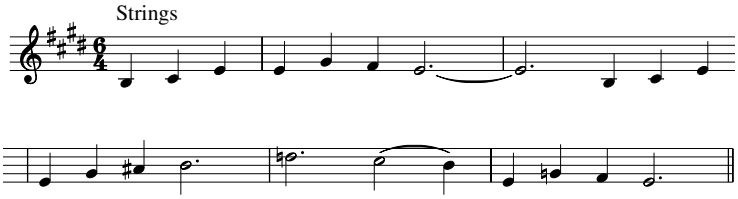


an inverted form of RVW's building blocks appear. "Common currency" maybe, or perhaps something a little deeper?

This is not, incidently, to discount the issue of atmospheric similarity– listeners might for example, on listening to the *poco animato* of RVW's first movement (Fig 4), imagine Holst's galumphing wizards as they appear in *Uranus* or *The Perfect Fool.* There is something of the same sense of clodhoppedness in RVW's rather lumbering 12/8.

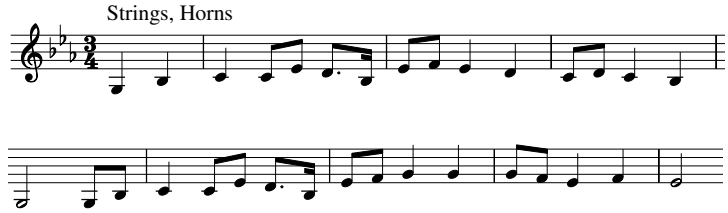
To return to purely musical comparisons though, let us examine two "big tunes" – the "first-movement closer" from RVW

Ex. 11: RVW6, 1st movt., Fig. 15



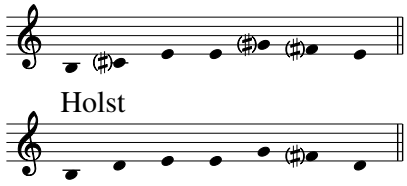
and the famous tune from the centre of *Jupiter*:

Ex. 12: *Jupiter,* bar 193



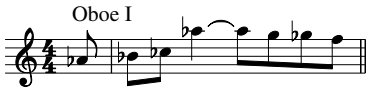
At first sight these tunes would appear to have little in common apart from their expansive nature, both partaking of the world of the Elgarian *nobilimente*. Harmonically, the RVW operates in a free modality while Holst's is four-square diatonic, with not an accidental in sight. But let us examine the way they begin a little more closely; stripping the first seven notes of rhythmic values and raising the Holst to RVW's pitch level, we get:

Ex. 13: RVW



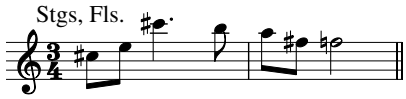
Different exact pitches, different rhythms, but what a startling coincidence of *contour*. Lest this be considered an isolated example, let us also take the oboe figure from RVW's Epilogue:

Ex. 14: RVW6, Epilogue, Fig. 5



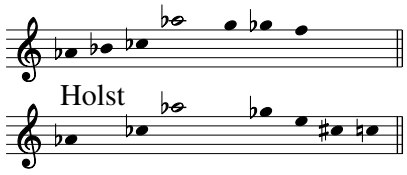
and Holst's figure from *Venus* (bar 80)

Ex. 15: *Venus,* bar 80



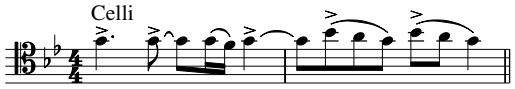
Performing the same stripping and levelling operation:

Ex. 16: RVW



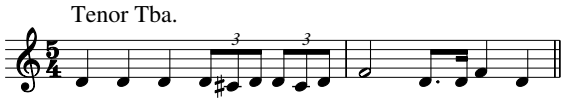
More variation between the two is evident here, but what grabs the ear in both cases is the upward leap of the sixth to a long note and the subsequent gentle fall, the details of approach and quitting that sixth do not change the similarity of the overall contour. Thirdly, there is this important figure from RVW's first movement (Fig 6)

Ex. 17: RVW6, 1st movt., Fig. 6



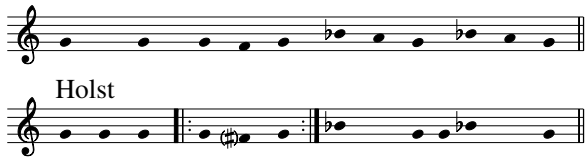
which may be described as three hammered notes of the same pitch with a dip to lower neighbour, followed by a figure working over a downward minor third. Now here is the famous tenor tuba solo from *Mars*, which may share much the same verbal description:

Ex. 18: *Mars,* Fig. IV



Performing the stripping and levelling once again:

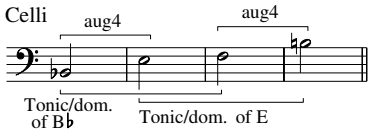
Ex. 19: RVW



The similarity of contour is again obvious.

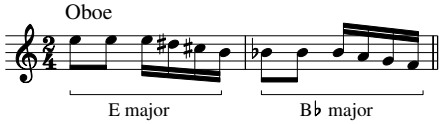
Let us also examine the foundations of RVW's Scherzo movement – the rising figure at the opening consisting of two pairs of augmented fourths, which are actually the interlocked tonics and dominants of Bb and E; which sets these two notes up as key centres for the movement:

Ex. 20: RVW6, Scherzo



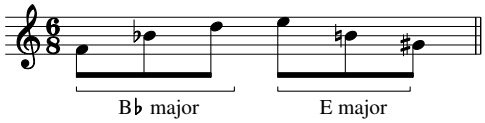
and the beginning of the chattering phrase which answers this, being chunks of the scales of Bb and E:

Ex. 21: RVW6, Scherzo, bar 8



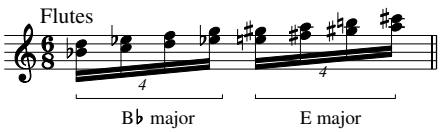
The interval of the augmented fourth fascinated both composers (as it has done many others), and in *Mercury* Holst used the chords of Bb major and E major to construct his first motif:

Ex. 22: *Mercury*



and subsequently we find scale fragments used upwards in much the same way that RVW used them downwards

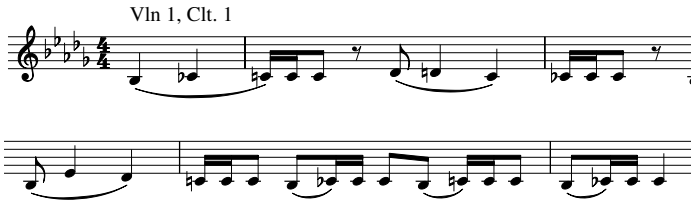
Ex. 23: *Mercury,* bar 283



So, Holst founds his scherzo movement of *The Planets* on the twin poles of Bb and E, and constructs a basically bitonal piece around them. So does RVW in his symphony – on exactly the same pair of notes.

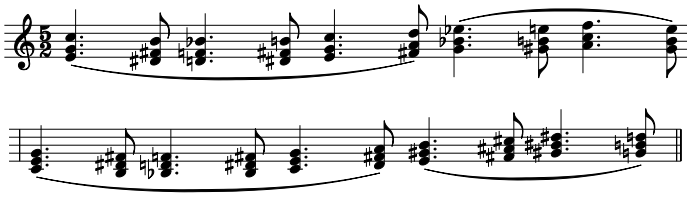
Finally, there are points of similarity of general texture or thought between the two works – not definable in strict scientific terms but sounding related at a more subliminal level. The ostinato of RVW's second movement arises out of the figure he begins with::

Ex 24: RVW6, opening of 2nd. movt.



a slithering tune which slides largely chromatically but does incorporate some whole tone movement and the occasional larger leap, just like the slithery writing of Holst's first movement::

Ex. 25: Holst, *Mars*



Great minds are indeed thinking alike – how consciously is the intriguing, but sadly now unanswerable, question. Space does not permit a full dissection of the symphony and comparison with Holst's works, but readers may like to contemplate the *cumulative* effect of the examples given here, and find more themselves.

RVW's *Sixth Symphony* has puzzled commentators from the time of its appearance in 1948. It seems to contain such a wealth of conflicting emotion and style: the tortured, screaming opening leads into a more playful, but nevertheless hard-edged, bouncing scherzo-like section, to be followed by a big tune in two guises, the final one full of warmth and yearning. The slow movement combines the famous ostinato with oily chromatic slithering, only to be followed by the anguished cries of repeated chords rocking back and forth, and valedictory chordal passages. The rumbustious scherzo is full of hi-jinks, but one senses pain, perhaps even anger, underneath it all. Then finally the extraordinary Epilogue, so often described using the word "waste", but which to this listener at least contains more sorrow, and more than a hint of an eternal loss. Compositionally, it is a densely-packed, tightly constructed work, originating in a few germinal cells and exploiting them for all they are worth. No sprawling here, but Holstian discipline throughout.

One of the few things which RVW did "go public" with over this symphony was the quote from *The Tempest*: ". . . our little life is rounded with a sleep." "Whose life?", we may well ask. Might not this strange brew of humour and sorrow, anger and laughter, rumbustiousness and quietness, terror and emptiness – finishing in a searching gaze that stretches out into the void, be connected above all to the character, memory and music of ". . . the one friend he never ceased to miss."[vii] Gustav Holst?

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i Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p21;
ii Ursula Vaughan Williams, *Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p200
iii Kennedy, p241
iv Kennedy, p349
v Ibid
vi Kennedy, p351
vii UVW, p273

The Nature of RVW's Musical Language and other Musings

by Timothy Arena

I am delighted to now be a member of the RVW society and I greatly appreciate all of the efforts that the Society has made on behalf of the music of one who I now consider to be my favourite composer, in fact one of the greatest composers of the 20th century if not all time. Thank you especially for helping to bring about recordings of *Sir John in Love* and *The Poisoned Kiss*. The means by which I have reached my conclusions about RVW may perhaps be of interest to society members. Also, I must convey in words the thoughts that have pervaded my mind concerning the nature of RVW's musical language and its critical reception. Finally, I would like to propose some topics for further research and analysis into RVW's music that could perhaps be submitted as articles for the journal.

I have known and loved RVW's music for about 10 years now. I have gradually come to collect most of the available CD's (many works with multiple recordings. As you have pointed out, someone should record *The Sons of Light*). I came to know most of his works through recordings because performances are all too scant here in the USA (more on this later). I was fully amazed by each one as I came to know it. The next logical step for me was then to begin collecting the scores and analysing the music. I wanted to know *why* his music was great. This, I believe, should be the motivation for all musical analysis. The ear first, and then the eye: this is a good axiom. RVW believed this as is evinced by "The Letter and the Spirit" essay. Thus I have spent the last five years completely immersed in absorbing and analysing RVW's music. I have studied many of the scores here at the Indiana University Music Library extensively. (I just finished my Masters in Choral Conducting/Music Theory. I'm also an aspiring composer). *National Music and other Essays* and Kennedy's *Works* book have been constant companions. I have also studied the other books and writings on RVW's music such as Foss's biography, James Day's *Master Musicians book*, Dickinson's book, Mellers' *Vision of Albion* and others such as Hugh Ottaway's writings.

Michael Kennedy's (and some others) writings on RVW and his *Works* book are the most insightful and usually avoid the following issues. But I have always been very puzzled by many of the other writings on RVW's music. First of all, it seems clear that many of the writings tend almost invariably toward metaphorical and far too descriptive and detailed "interpretations" of what his works "mean." This is especially true of Foss's biography and Mellers' book. But even some of the more recent writings have this problem: Arnold Whitttall's article in the *Vaughan Williams Studies* book on the *Fifth Symphony* is also of this nature (though here one also finds technical analysis—of an inappropriate kind, I believe). I find this strange for two reasons: 1. RVW warned constantly about detailed programs. Even in cases where he provided programmatic clues himself, (i.e. *London Symphony*, *Sinfonia Antartica*, *Ninth Symphony*, etc.) he always maintained that the music should "stand or fall" as absolute music, and that the programs were just to "set the mood." As he said in a 1957 letter to Maurice Reeve, "I feel very angry with certain critics who will have it that my *4th Symphony* "means" war and my 5th "means" peace - and so on." He also said: "If my music doesn't make itself understood as music without any tributary explanation - well it's a failure and there's nothing more to be said. It matters enormously to the composer what he was thinking about when he wrote a particular work; but to no one else in the world does it matter one jot." It's not that we shouldn't talk or write about what RVW's music "conveys" in terms of feelings or thoughts, but rather that we should not tend toward such detailed narratives and "interpretations" 2. These kinds of writings tend to imply that the music is not worthy of technical analysis. Dickinson does notice some recurrent harmonic and melodic features and he takes great pains to say that he is analysing the music, including the harmonies, but much of the time he talks much without saying anything. His analyses are perfunctory and he misses many structural elements - especially in his analysis of the *Ninth Symphony*. He also completely dismisses works such as *Dona Nobis* and *Serenade to Music*, the latter because it is "too mellifluous."! Anything not up to his pseudo-intellectual opinions of importance - in which he attempts to graft RVW's music onto a master narrative of "development" or "progress" - is termed "jejune" and "automatic." He seems to think that some works are "retrogressive." He clearly misses the point that RVW's output is not about progress or development (though of course these did occur) but about finding the right means to convey intelligibly in music whatever artistic impulses seized him. Why is it that for so many years music critics and historians have had this horribly simple-minded idea that music is about "originality" or "progress" in terms of technical language? The purpose of technique is to communicate intelligibly, effectively and coherently. The reason that musical techniques change and evolve is because we do. Our needs change, and composers (real ones) seek to communicate artistically, beyond the scope of words, in such a way that is meaningful to the hearers in whatever time and place he happens to be. Certainly RVW knew this and lived it. He knew that technique, in and of itself, means nothing; it is a means to an end.

RVW's essay on Beethoven's *Ninth* shows that he felt much could be gained from technical analysis. He keeps metaphors to a minimum and points out that though these are necessary at times (music is more precise than words, as Mendelssohn said, we do the best that we can), they should not be the basis for our understanding of a work. He said himself, "I do not believe in meanings and mottoes." "Can't a man just write a piece of music?" "It occurred to me like this," etc. But RVW's music is worthy of detailed technical analysis. Instead one finds a curiously patronizing view of the composer fostered in his own lifetime by admirers - one that is still found today. He was described in terms of "sublime incompetence" and as "floundering about in the sea of his ideas like some ungainly porpoise" by Cecil Gray and as "rolling over and over in a ploughed field on a wet day" by Hugh Allen. These kinds of comments made a backlash inevitable. Several writers, including his champions and detractors, have mentioned an ostensible lack of technique in his music. RVW's references to his own "lack of technique" cannot be taken entirely at face value, and were probably an attempt at modesty. But none of the writers has ever provided any evidence to substantiate a conclusion for a lack of technique. Donald Mitchell's famous derogatory comments about *Hodie* being "under-composed" and how it makes "noticeable how clumsy his technique can be" are not backed up by any musical examples. Some have mentioned technical shortcomings in the *Sea Symphony* (especially the finale) but they also have not said where or

what these were. I find this work to be technically sound. The recurrent motives and the harmonic progressions derived from chords a third apart bind this work together beautifully. All of the symphonies are masterful in construction. They are not all "traditional" in structure, however. The *Fourth* is the most traditional in structure, and is (as several have pointed out) somewhat modelled on elements of Beethoven's *Fifth*. But several of the other symphonies are original and unusual in form. Technique is, after all, the means by which a composer expresses his thoughts and feelings in such a way that they will be intelligible, meaningful, and formally coherent to the hearers. It is NOT something used to prove how clever you are to the world. Many composers need to realize this. That RVW had the ability to communicate effectively is without doubt. As Rachmaninov said, "Without technique, there can be no expression."

That many still believe this idea of RVW's poor technique is borne out by the fact that there has still been very little thorough technical analysis of his music. Even Kennedy's writings are usually not very technical in nature. Perhaps there are some studies of which I am not aware. James Day mentions Deryk Cooke's article on the *Sixth Symphony*, but our University library does not own this. Now some of Frogley's studies, including his recent book on the *Ninth Symphony*, are a good start, but even here I think there are some potential problems. Both here and in the "Models and mutations" article by Arnold Whittall on the *Fifth Symphony* there is a gravitation toward Schenkerian types of linear analyses. But this type of analysis should be confined to works in the tonal common practice tradition, particularly German/Austrian composers. RVW's music does not fit into this tradition, and thus the German type of analysis will not work for his music.

The area that I think has been almost completely neglected in all studies of RVW's music is his use of *harmony*. This is the area I would like to pursue in my studies. Many of the emotional qualities often commented upon in his music—contemplative awe, religious feeling, rapture, anger, passion, tenderness, tranquillity, etc. but especially that elusive one most call "visionary"—all these are achieved largely by the harmonies and progressions. These also sometimes play a part in the construction of the work, as in *A Sea Symphony*. (Many have not noticed the many ways in which the opening progression from Bb minor to D major is echoed in transformed ways throughout the finale, as well as the many transformations of the "and on its limitless heaving breast" motive). *Sancta Civitas* is also unified by motives and harmonies that no one has seemed to notice. The chordal oscillations and motives of the first section are used throughout the work to unify it. Especially noteworthy is the way the added-note chords of the opening in the flutes are transformed throughout the work, including at the "new heaven and earth" section, or the way the chordal progression at "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" is used again for "Lord God Almighty" toward the end of the work in the "Holy, Holy, Holy" section. RVW's admiration of Wagner is well known, and I believe RVW uses harmony often in a similarly psychological and constructive way (no matter how different in technique and effect). In all of RVW's music, it is not so much the chords themselves, but rather the way one chord moves to the next that is so compellingly original. But often the vertical sonorities themselves are new and original—for example the tranquil but nostalgic sonorities created by diatonic dissonant counterpoint or bi-modal chord streams, "added-note" sonorities, and "augmented seventh" sonorities (these latter are especially noteworthy in the *London Symphony* and *Sancta Civitas*). It is in the area of harmony that I believe RVW to have been just as much of an innovator as Wagner or Debussy. He built on what he learned from them and evolved one of the most originally colourful and expressive palates in music history. His English contemporaries Bax, Ireland and Delius may have had seemingly more "colourful" or "chromatic" harmonies, but certainly not more effective, apt or memorable. Now of course if his melodies were not also memorable and effective, the harmonies would be of little consequence.

There are also many works that have not received enough analysis of the motivic elements that are used to structure a work across movements. The *Ninth Symphony* still needs more attention in this regard (Frogley noticed many important things in the first movement). RVW's unique harmonic language is evident even as early as *Toward the Unknown Region* (though there are certain traces of Brahms and Wagner) in which amazingly original progressions convey the meaning of the uplifting words. All of his works are indicative of this in one way or another. The visionary, exuberant transcendence of the finale of the *Sea Symphony* is achieved through the use of some of the most originally effective and emotional harmonic progressions ever conceived. In the *Pastoral*, it is the use of chord streams that are used linearly and contrapuntally, and also bimodally that creates the nostalgic, contemplative, melancholy atmosphere. The *Fourth* gains its power and vigour and harshness by its use of quartal harmony and innovative modal scales. It is by means of the pure and mixed Dorian and Mixolydian modalities in juxtaposition with chromatic elements and Phyrgian, darker ones that achieve the *Fifth's* effects. The *Sixth* through the *Ninth* symphonies (the *Ninth* is surely one of his greatest works, as Kennedy has said, and part of the reason is RVW's use of visionary modes and harmonic progressions, especially in the outer movements) are most striking in their use of RVW's own synthetic modes and harmonies. *Flos Campi*, *Sancta Civitas*, *Hodie*, and the *Ninth Symphony* are especially astounding in this regard and are indicative of his originality in creating new modal scales (such as the "Lydian-minor" scale—noted by Frogley and others—used in *Sancta Civitas*, *Hodie*, and the *Ninth Symphony*), chordal progressions and sonorities. Mellers makes some insightful comments on these works, but to my mind, he always gets completely carried away in his "interpretations."

Why have RVW's harmonic procedures received so little attention? Perhaps because they are not based on a system of any kind. There is much more to it than "common chords." This element has been noticed by many writers—the use of planing or parallelism of triads. This technique is used in much of RVW's music, but it is especially pervasive in *Tallis* and the *Mass in G minor*. But even here there are other techniques in use. And this technique of planing is used in a startlingly wide variety of ways including bimodal and chromatic combinations. (By the way, where did the misguided myth originate that RVW's music was "purged" of chromaticism by folk and Tudor interests and is only chromatic when he depicts evil? These ideas are not true at all (though it is true to some degree in *The Pilgrims Progress*). Much of his music is chromatic in its harmony; and he uses chromaticism to "depict" whatever he wishes— (any of his works show this clearly, but especially *A Sea Symphony*, *London Symphony*, *Ninth Symphony*, *Sancta Civitas*, *Flos Campi*, *Oxford Elegy*, *Five Tudor portraits*, I could go on). RVW's chromaticism DID change from a Wagnerian kind to a more personal kind, but it certainly did not go away. James Day points out concerning the *Pastoral* in the Master Musicians series book, page 193: "A vertical 'slice' through the harmony at many points produces some remarkably dissonant combinations." (Day, in fact, does have some good analytical points in his study, especially here in the "epilogue" section). The main point of course is not just that they are dissonant, but that they create an ambiguous type of feeling that is very difficult to put into words. This is also true of RVW's diatonic "pastoral" style. Far from being some sort of dull country haze, RVW's music in this style is shot through often with a yearningly sad nostalgic quality that is anything but simple and "unsophisticated." It should be realized that it takes technique to accomplish this. RVW's use of diatonic dissonance is the source of this quality. The vertical sonorities are very complex and varied according to the mood he wishes to convey. This is why I do object to Day's patronizing summary of RVW in the last sentence of his book. After rightly pointing out that RVW dealt with the "metaphysical problem" better than most of his contemporaries, and that he often "left the earthy far behind;" he says that this "was the result of his character, not his technique." But is it not true that his music could not have had that "unearthly" quality if his character had not prompted him to develop a very solid technique in melody, harmony, and texture?!

Why is it necessary to analyse RVW's music? As I said before, the point of analysis is to find out *why* the music we love is so great, not to prove that it is. Assumptions that RVW had poor technique, not unlike other misinformed ideas about other composers (such as the ideas that Schumann and Brahms were bad orchestrators) seem to be repeated ad infinitum without bothering to check the facts. It is high time for serious analysis. Now here in this country, there is a great need for a RVW reassessment. The problem here is that (if Indiana University- considered to be one of the best music schools in the country—is any indication) very few study or perform RVW's music or any other English music for that matter. It is all too rare to see RVW's major works programmed in the USA—especially the symphonies (despite the welcome efforts of Slatkin and Previn in the recording studio)—and never at this University. Why? Several reasons: 1. Many professors here, especially those in the theory and musicology departments come from a completely German-based tradition. Non-German composers are given hardly any attention at all. They do not give a composer any study unless his music has been surrounded in a mass of analytical verbiage of the German kind of analysis. Therefore they really do not know what to do with composers who do not fit nicely into this tradition, or who are not avant garde. They then assume that these non-German composers "lack technique" or are just "folky." I have never been able to understand the idea that if a non-German composer uses folk-song as an inspiration (as of course RVW did) he tends to be viewed as a sort of quaint and unsophisticated nationalist. Why is it that they do not realize that the great German composers were "nationalists" as well? Brahms was immensely interested in German folk-songs; he arranged many of them and he himself said that when trying to compose a melody, he thought of German folk-songs. Schubert's music could certainly not exist without German folk-song. As RVW so aptly puts it: "If we look at a collection of German Volkslieder we are apt to be disappointed because the tunes look exactly like the simpler Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert tunes. The truth of course is the other way out. The tunes of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert are so very much like Volkslieder. We talk of the 'classical tradition' and the 'grand manner'. This really means the *German* manner because it so happened that the great classical period of music corresponded with the great line of German composers. What we call the classical idiom is the *Teutonic* idiom and it is absolutely as narrowly national as Grieg or Moussorgsky" (Vaughan Williams, *National Music*, page 48). Most theory and musicology professors here do not consider 20th century works to be important unless they were "revolutionary" or "influential" or the founder of an "ism." But they completely ignore the originality of tonal/modal composers such as Barber, Rachmaninov, Sibelius, Nielsen, Vaughan Williams, all other English composers and others. This is not an exaggeration. I have had to instruct my choral conducting teachers about English music. The great English choral works of last century are unknown to them! (We are glad to now have Jon Poole—formerly with the BBC singers—here who has made a difference in this regard). But these tonal/modal composers are the ones that are really "influential" to music lovers. These are the 20th century composers that can really fill a concert hall. 2. If the professors here do not study and teach English music, the students will not be aware of it and thus it will not be performed. 3. If it is not performed, then the theorists and musicologists will continue to see no need to study it; and thus the cycle of ignorance will continue. This is why I hope to perhaps perform and analyze RVW's music in my career to help change this.

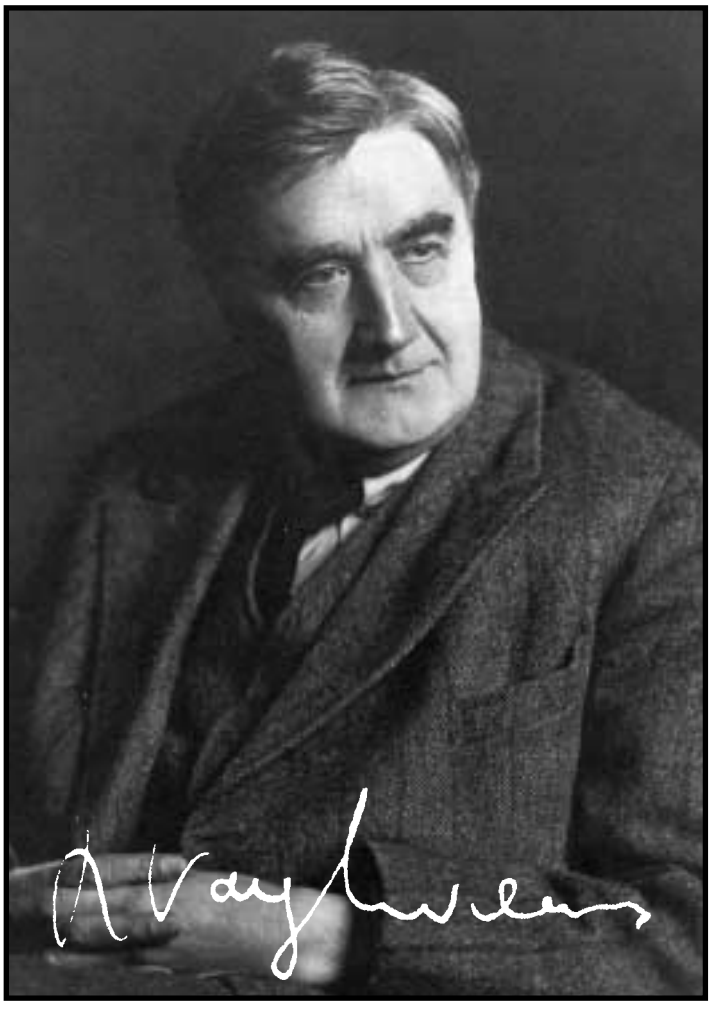
Notice that the reasons I have given for RVW's neglect here have nothing to do with the idea that his music is somehow "not exportable." If the world were more aware of English music, I believe it would love it. I found some very encouraging evidence in a customer CD review on the German Amazon website. It was a review of the Handley complete symphony cycle on EMI. Loosely translating from the German, it says, "Vaughan Williams was a great English composer. It is unfortunate that English music has been so little known in Germany for the last 200 years. These are great symphonies . . .This is very good music with very good interpretations," etc. Also, there was a gleam of hope even here at the University when my friend and fellow RVW Society member Greg Martin almost single-handedly arranged for a "Finzi-Fest" last year to celebrate his centenary. Christopher Finzi came here and was our guest for the week, giving lectures and attending concerts. Not surprisingly the event received little support from the choral, theory, and musicology departments. However, it was the vocal department and students who carried the day by their enthusiastic responses and singing of Finzi's wonderful songs, and some RVW ones as well. A small step, but an important one. It was also quite encouraging to read in the November 1995 issue about Vernon Handley's experience in Germany with the Director of the Richard Strauss Institute, in which the German said that Elgar's symphonies were second only to the main symphonist of the 20th century - Vaughan Williams. This is quoted by Steve Martland who also postulated some reasons for a perceived English "insularity" in his 1995 Proms talk on the *Sixth Symphony*, quoted in the November 1995 Journal: "This constant need to address the national characteristics of our home grown music surely suggests an insecurity about the quality of the music. Everyone thinks its great but they aren't quite certain if they're conning themselves - after all, German orchestras hardly ever program the stuff." This is precisely the attitude that Vaughan Williams fought against his whole life in his writings and music. He proved by his words and music that England has nothing to be ashamed of. Martland goes on, "Maybe an island mentality (being cut off from the continent and the lack of a continuing musical tradition along the lines of the Austro-German one) creates a sense of inferiority or even parochialism. Perhaps the English are just too modest about their cultural heritage." Is it perhaps this that comes closest to the truth? But this inferiority attitude is not necessary. Of course your art grew out of your soil, but it is not only for you, it is for everyone! Again, it is English writers who started this myth of "insularity." I do not claim to be an expert on English culture during RVW's time (I've never even been to England), but I have gained some insights by reading the writings themselves and also Frogley's important essay in the Studies book: "Constructing Englishness in music: national character and the reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams." It appears that England has had a musical inferiority complex for a long time. The enormous praise that RVW received during his lifetime - praise largely based on his "Englishness," "rural simplicity," and even ostensible "clumsiness"- seems to have become a source of embarrassment for people like Donald Mitchell and many still seem to feel that RVW was not "international" enough. A close study of RVW's writings puts his love of folk song in the proper light. He points out that folk-song is not about parochialism or narrow insularity, but rather about finding an avenue of beauty - the "*mot juste*" - that conveys the native language and temperament of the land of one's birth so as to make one's music intelligible to one's countrymen. But if a composer is authentically national, he will eventually become universal. As RVW puts it: "It is because Palestrina and Verdi are essentially Italian and because Bach, Beethoven and Wagner are essentially German that their message transcends their frontiers." - "Why should music be National?" from *National Music*. He points out that folk song is a starting point for high artistic endeavours, as well as being a thing beautiful in itself. He found in folk-song "a musical idiom which we unconsciously were cultivating in ourselves, it gave a point to our imagination. . . . The knowledge of our folk-songs did not so much discover for us something new, but uncovered for us something which had been hidden by foreign matter." (Vaughan Williams, *National Music* pg. 41) But all influences that affected him were absorbed into his own aesthetics of the beautiful and the visionary. RVW was a very original composer who used any means he thought worthy to communicate artistically. Inevitably this would include folk song. Why did RVW talk so much about its importance? He wanted his countrymen to understand they possessed a wonderful treasure of neglected indigenous music that was worthy of artistic amplification. He wanted them to realize that foreigners were not the only ones who were inherently artistic or

musical. He wanted the continent to see that England was no longer "das Land ohne Musik." He wanted England to build on its own heritage the way other nations had done until folk song became part of every English composer's arsenal. He advocated this type of "conscious" revival that then leads to an "unself-conscious" approach to the use of folk-song material in which the composer naturally speaks his own language.

But it must be pointed out that even though RVW loved and built on folk-song and as much as he built upon England's musical past, his music is NOT 1. *Entirely* "based on" folk music and Tudor composers, and 2. His building on these is not a sign of lack of technique. The first point warrants much attention. As Alain Frogley points out in "National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams" from the *Studies* book: "A number of myths about Vaughan Williams began to develop, including the erroneous idea that . . . his music had rejected the immediate past wholesale and was based almost exclusively on folk and Tudor models. [This] idea has become so ingrained that it goes unchallenged . . . despite the fact that the bulk of Vaughan Williams's work was in the genres such as symphony and opera, not mass, motet, or folk-song setting." It seems that most writers have simply reiterated this formula of "folk and Tudor" without checking for its validity. This is not to say that they were not real influences. But the Tudor influence is really only *all-pervasive* in a handful of works, and even in these (*Tallis Fantasia*, *Mass in G minor*, and perhaps a few others) the sounds are nothing like anything Tallis or Byrd would have recognized. This idea also ignores the non-English sources of inspiration for Vaughan Williams: his love of Bach, Brahms and (especially) Wagner, his studies with Ravel, his interest in Bartok and Sibelius, etc. RVW noticed, during his own lifetime, a growing fallacy in a charge of "archaism" in his use of the modes. He wrote: "It is not correct to refer to the modes as 'old', or of pure modal harmony as 'archaic'. Real archaic harmony is never modal. When harmony grew out of the Organum, composers found that they could not work in the modes with their new-found harmonic scheme and they began to alter the modal melodies to give them the necessary intervals with which they could work. The harmony of Palestrina and his contemporaries is therefore not *purely* modal; this was reserved for the nineteenth century. Modal melodies . . . began to suggest to them [nineteenth century Russian nationalists] all sorts of harmonic implications . . .We find this neo-modal harmony throughout Mussorgsky's *Boris*. The lead was taken up by Debussy and the French contemporaries, some of the modern Italians and the modern English. . . Debussy's *Sarabande* is a good example of pure modal harmony, as are the cadences in the minuet from Ravel's *Sonatine*. I find it difficult to see what there is 'archaic' about these. If you look at real archaic harmony, going back even as far as Josquin and Dunstable, you will find nothing like it." (Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and other essays* (1963), pgs. 25-26'. This is a true statement, if it is emphasized that Vaughan Williams is differentiating between *pure* modal harmony as used by himself and other 20th century composers, and *modified* modal harmony used by Tudor and Elizabethan composers in which the modal *melodic* elements were always mediated by *ficta* leading tones and the emerging tonal harmonic system. Of course Vaughan Williams knew that the Tallis tune he used for his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* is in a relatively pure Phrygian. But what he is mainly referring to here is the consistent use of modal *harmony*, especially perhaps chordal progressions in the pure Aeolian (as used in the Debussy and Ravel examples he mentions), Dorian, and Mixolydian (all with lowered seventh scale degrees). It is also important to note that RVW was interested in the modes long before he started collecting folk songs. He writes in his *Musical Autobiography* about being "quite bitten by the modes" and writing a modal waltz while he was studying with Stanford. Folk-songs are quoted in none of the symphonies or the major choral works. Of course the influence is always there in the contours of his melodic lines, but many pages of RVW are permeated with synthetic modes of his own devising. As Alain Frogley points out again in the same essay, "Mention the name Ralph Vaughan Williams and into most people's minds come immediately three words: English, pastoral, and folksong." This had never been the case with me at all before I read the literature on him. With me it was something more like: "visionary, transcendent, powerful, humanistic, bold, original, fascinating modal usages, amazing harmonic vocabulary", etc.

I propose that RVW's music should be analyzed thoroughly in order to understand his musical language and how he communicated his many and varied thoughts and feelings. This does not mean analysis according to the manner that seems to be advocated here at the University in which one can rarely "see the forest for the trees." This Germanic-influenced method analyses music with charts and graphs to the point of absurdity until it no longer resembles music but something more like a chemistry formula. But often this is merely an appearance, for the things to which they refer could easily be elucidated without all of this unnecessary verbiage and pseudo-intellectual garb. Often, sadly, it seems to me the point of all of this is merely to impress colleagues. On the other hand, I would also eschew the overly metaphorical and "interpretative" approach of many English writers in which everything under the sun is talked of except the music itself. I propose rather to combine elements of the two methods in a way that leads to a fuller understanding of RVW's communicative language. Surely those who know and love their RVW will lose nothing of their appreciation for his music by having a glimpse into his workshop.

In closing, let me echo the wonderfully eloquent words of Roger Norrington as quoted in the June Journal: "I want to portray a major international figure of twentieth-century music, . . . a marvellously individual composer, who just happened to be English: a composer who chose his tonalities as freely as Debussy and Ravel, his unique rhythms as deftly as Stravinsky and Bartok. . . . a master who may have worn tweed and enjoyed cream buns . . . but whose soul was ablaze with glory, pity and anger, . . . a man whose sense of social duty made him seek to write music for everybody."



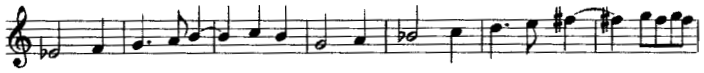
THE UNITY OF THE SINFONIA ANTARTICA

by Jeffrey Aldridge

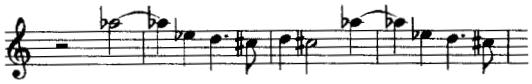
The problem, of course, was how to transform the fragmentary, if impressive, musical moments of a film score into a coherent symphonic work. Commentators galore by now have pointed out that Vaughan Williams did not employ traditional sonata forms in his symphonic works, though most have admitted that, in his search for a valid form of symphonic expression, he did approximate to them. By this I mean that in his opening movements he adopted a form, parallel to sonata form, in which two contrasted themes (or sections) received a workout before being revisited, if not repeated note for note. Furthermore, he developed some of this opening material differently in other movements of the piece, thereby imposing a thematic unity over the whole work. This is most clearly seen in the *Fourth Symphony* (the most nearly 'classical' of his symphonies), in which all four movements make use of the opening two motifs. I have tried to show in another essay how this was achieved, more subtly, in the *Pastoral Symphony*. Other symphonies which demonstrate similar uses of material across movements are the *Sixth* and the *Ninth*: in these two cases the first and last movements, however different they may sound from each other, are closely linked thematically.

The *Sinfonia Antartica* is similarly constructed. Although the likeness to classical sonata form in the first movement may seem more tenuous than usual, the thematic unity over the whole work is even greater. Perhaps Vaughan Williams's concerns lest the piece seem to be merely an overblown film score led him to exert such tight control over the thematic material.

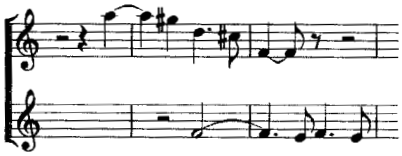
A major unifying feature of the themes across the work is the fall of a semitone. The number of times that this occurs (I haven't counted but it must be dozens) means that it cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. To begin at the beginning: the opening theme is a rising sequence of notes (denoting, as Wilfrid Mellers says, "strifeful aspiration") which are stopped in their rise, first by one, then by a repeated falling semitone; the symbolic value of a rising series of notes being counteracted by a fall is clear, I think.



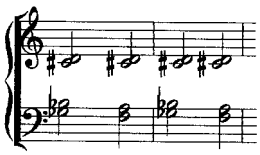
After this opening section rises to a climax there is a pause before xylophone and piano provide the icy accompaniment to the second theme in which the descending semitone is a prominent feature.



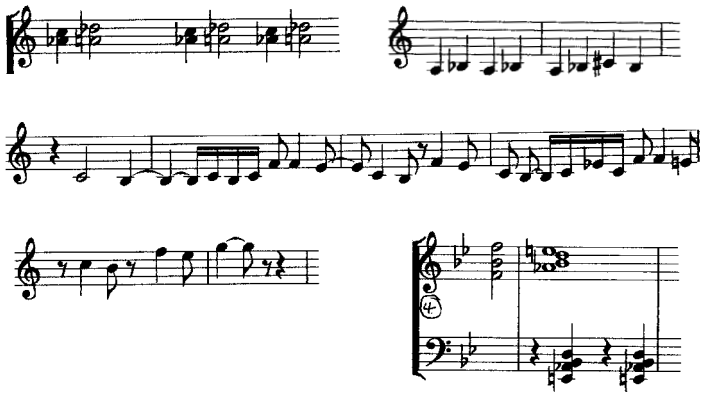
This leads into the linked motif sung by the soprano solo, accompanied by a small group of women's voices whose music is made entirely of the semitone falls.



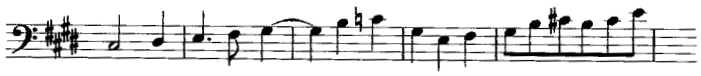
While these notes are sung, the orchestra plays this; once again the fall of a semitone is dominant:



These are the main features of the 'exposition'. The following 'development' section is decidedly episodic, but once again the oscillations over a semitone feature throughout, making sure that the section is not too fragmentary. The first three examples occur within a space of only twenty-two bars, the fourth some twenty bars after the third.

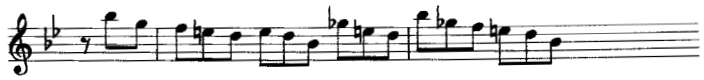


The 'recapitulation' transforms the opening melody and presents the only openly optimistic (D major) music in the whole symphony. It is introduced by fanfares which announce the change in mood and the theme itself is notable for the transfiguration of those repeated semitone oscillations into something less threatening:



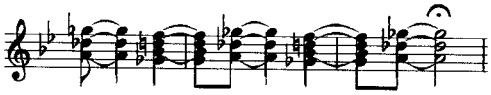
Consequently the movement concludes in triumph. The mood is, if you like, optimistic: man is setting out to confront and, indeed, defeat the forces of nature.

This mood having been established, it cannot be banished just yet. So none of this business with descending semitones disturbs the high jinks of the scherzo, which, as we know is a seascape complete with wildlife. Therefore, I think it would be stretching things a bit to fit the descending triplet figures that follow the 'penguin' tune into the overall pattern, though bar three here echoes the opening of the second theme of the first movement:



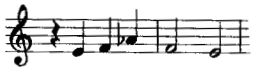
However, in the very final bars, Vaughan Williams decides that we need preparing for what is to come in the third movement. Consequently, these bars feature celesta and muted trumpets, to alert us to the particular sound-world that is to follow, and this is their song; needless to say, the

fall of a semitone reappears:

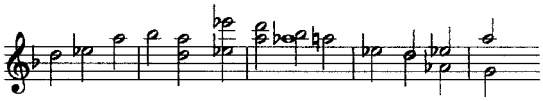


The third movement takes this up immediately with the flutes:

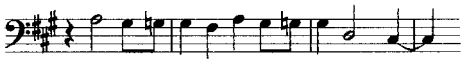
Against this background, the horns intone the opening three notes of the (first and last movements of) the *Sixth Symphony* with the addition of a returning semitone descent to where it started.



The hugely slow 'glacier' theme once again consists of semitone shifts, some up, some down.

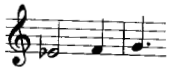


Later a theme on violas and cellos maintains the pattern.

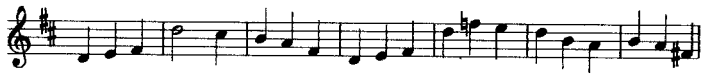


Of course, what I am writing does no justice to the immense power of this music, especially as it builds to that huge climax when the organ overwhelms even the full orchestra, but that is not what I want to convey in this essay. Here I am trying to show how those necessarily fragmentary bits of film score have been fused into a genuinely symphonic structure.

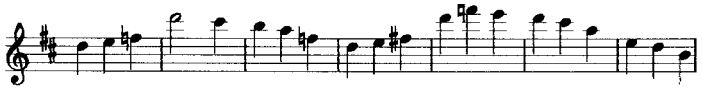
So what about the next movement, the Intermezzo? Its opening is certainly different in mood from what we have just experienced: harp chords introducing a solo oboe, almost parody 'pastoral' RVW. Yet, remember the opening theme of the first movement, its first three notes:



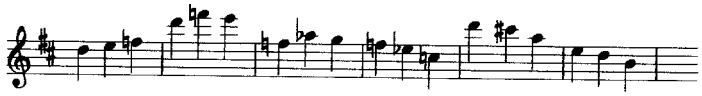
Play them a semitone lower and we have the opening of the Intermezzo:



The next time we hear it, the tune is developed slightly:

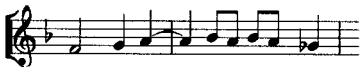


The next episode provides a variation on the opening three rising notes:

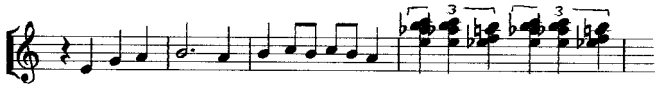


This, then, is not really the escapist reverie that some people take it for. This is underlined brutally when Vaughan Williams reminds us where the main action is with the bells tolling across the descending semitones and hints of the opening theme from the first movement. The return of the oboe theme is still marked Tranquillo, but it hardly stays around long enough to pour any balm, and the concluding cello descent, though not semitonal, offers no comfort.

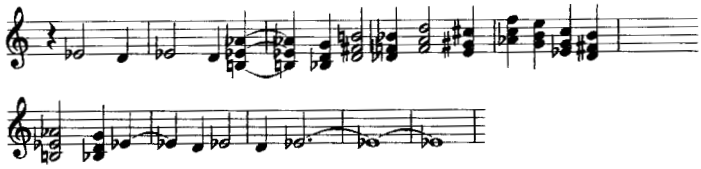
Against the "terrific" tremolando that opens the Epilogue, trumpets once again sound a fanfare. It is linked to the fanfare in the first movement but lacks its optimistic challenge; this one is more baleful, sounding more like nature's challenge to man than the other way about. Once again we hear the motto theme that opened the whole symphony, this time transformed into a doggedly defiant march; once again those falling semitones are prominent:



New material appears, and once again the familiar feature is repeated :



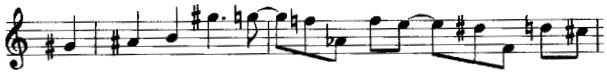
And so the work goes until its conclusion: the opening theme is heard as it was at the very beginning of the work, builds once more, then dies away. The soprano repeats her song, the women's voices joining in their keening semitones. Indeed, that is the way the world ends, with these keening voices always singing the falling semitone, accompanied only by lower strings and the ever-present wind.



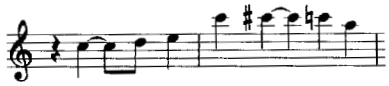
A long, three-part PS this time.

1. I wrote the first draft of this essay before receiving my February 2002 edition of the RVW Journal with its piece by Ronald Allan which includes reference to the falling semitones which link the thematic material in the third movement of the *Sinfonia Antartica.* I hope that I have shown that this feature extends over much more than the third movement. I am grateful to Mr Allan for his insight with regard to the disappearance of the tuned percussion (xylophone, vibraphone, glockenspiel, celesta) after the third movement. Given Wilfrid Mellers' argument that these represent glacial nature, Mr Allan's point about a shift to the human perspective, until those final bars with the wind machine, is well made. Of course, those other tuned percussion instruments, the deep bell and the piano, still feature.

2. That oboe melody that opens the Intermezzo: it is interesting that it first appears in the *Sixth Symphony*, where it seems to be the only moment of warmth in that 'icy' finale. (It should be noted, too, that it is formed from the opening notes of what can be termed the first and second subjects of the first movement of the Sixth.)



3. I well remember sitting in the Festival Hall on 2nd April 1958, listening to the first performance of the Ninth Symphony. Did anyone else share my slight sense of shock at hearing the solo clarinet introduce the second episode of the first movement?



I distinctly remember thinking, "Again!" It is interesting to speculate what it is in that sequence of notes that drew Vaughan Williams back to it in three major works, but I have to say that my speculations have reached no convincing conclusions.

Ralph Vaughan Williams and his association with the Three Choirs Festival, 1910 - 1912

by Faith Hillier

Gloucestershire was home to many of the leading composers of the early twentieth century, including Hubert Parry, Ivor Gurney, Herbert Howells and Gerald Finzi. The rich musical heritage of the county was represented with the tri-annual Three Choirs Festival of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester. It became an important platform for new works to be made accessible to a wider audience and attracted Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams among others.

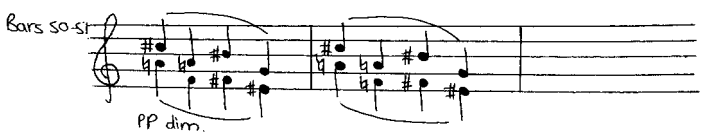
Born in Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, Vaughan Williams moved away when he was young. He was introduced to the Three Choirs Festival in 1910 with *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, premiered in Gloucester cathedral. The following year saw *Five Mystical Songs* at Worcester cathedral and in 1912, his *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* was first heard in Hereford cathedral. These three works commissioned by the Festival committee were each related in some way to the cathedral or county for which they were written.

The Three Choirs Festival began early in the eighteenth century, although the precise date of the first 'music meeting' is unknown. The chorus and singing are the main focus of the Festival and it has gained a reputation for its oratorio performances. Handel's *Messiah* was performed in Gloucester cathedral in 1757 and has been repeated at almost every subsequent meeting.

The Festival was influential during the new English Renaissance, which took place at the turn of the twentieth century. Parry's *Scenes from Prometheus Unbound* performed at Gloucester cathedral in 1880 began a choral revival taken up by Elgar with *Dream of Gerontius* and *The Apostles* among others. Vaughan Williams was the next influential composer to take English music into the new century. His *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* was based on Tallis' third of ten tunes written for Archbishop Matthew Parker's *Metrical Psalter* in 1567. The string orchestra it is written for emulates the human voice, which has praised God in the cathedral for over nine hundred years and is central to the Festival. An organ sound is also simulated through the use of mutes without vibrato. These organ and voice implications relate the music to its sacred surroundings.

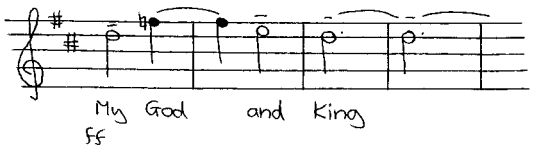
Tudor and twentieth century styles were juxtaposed within a sacred framework. Elements of Tudor church music like the Madrigal are found, with flexible rhythms and alternate contrapuntal sections. The composer's characteristic parallel fifths, seen in the bass line at the start of the work, are a feature of his own style.

Vaughan Williams uses tonal and modal (phrygian) harmonies to give a mix of ancient and modern techniques and adopts the Tudor use of alternating major and minor 3rds, 6ths and 7ths (Ex 1).



This combination of tonal and modal, old and new, creates an atmospheric sound. There are debates as to whether the composer tried to convey a feeling of spaciousness or that the cathedral's acoustics alone provided the unique atmosphere at the first performance. When the piece was performed, translucent chord spacings and the layout of instruments in separate groups gave this effect. Vaughan Williams exploited the reverberation created by tall Norman pillars and high ceilings, by overlapping instrumental entries so the sound did not die away.

Worcester cathedral contributed to the mood of *Five Mystical Songs* with its 'quality of reflection and contemplation'[1] Mysticism was a way of expressing Vaughan Williams's spiritual beliefs. The poetic imagery found in George Herbert's poetry is translated into music at the beginning of 'Easter' with the rising pitch and subtle chord changes, corresponding with the baritone's words 'Rise heart, thy Lord is Risen'. Plainsong is emulated with rhythmic flexibility and the use of obbligato plainsong melodies in '*I got me flowers*' and '*The Call*'. Herbert's rhythmic experiments are exploited by Vaughan Williams with the hemiolas in '*Antiphon*', bars 26-7 (Ex 2).



The choir was instructed to produce four different articulations: singing normally, with lips closed, humming with lips open and closed. The work was dedicated to the Festival as it was written especially for the voice of Cambell McInnes who performed it in 1910.

Vaughan Williams recognised Herefordshire's folk history by basing his work for the 1912 Festival, on English folksongs, two of which were local. In *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, the composer achieves the transition of folk to art music without losing the essential folk style. The *Fantasia* is a quodlibet – the four main sections are each based on a different carol. The first, 'This is the Truth sent from above' and last 'There is a Fountain' are from Herefordshire. The tunes are medieval and mystical sounding, giving continuity from the previous two works.

The use of the organ gives a religious implication. Folk music has been connected with the church since 500AD so the use of plainsong techniques, where folksongs are treated as cantus firmus, is justified. The religious element is common to all three pieces although Vaughan Williams did not belong to the Anglican Church. Much sixteenth century music is religious and church plainsong and Gregorian techniques are seen in *Five Mystical Songs* and *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. The Festival is ultimately religious and Vaughan Williams complimented it through music.

Vaughan Williams absorbed folk influences in structure, rhythm and modes, and this knowledge was important for his future musical direction. Folk music is 'the voice of the people'[2] and in the same way the Three Choirs Festival is for all people. It was the annual opportunity for composers to meet and discuss ideas and for people to hear local music. The influences of Thomas Tallis, George Herbert and folksong are all historic and the composer brought them into the twentieth century against the background of the ancient music festival, integrating them into his own style. As Foss states, 'Vaughan Williams is essentially an open-air composer. At his most mystical he is a pantheist among the cathedral arches, a countryman walking in the nave'.[3] This aptly describes Vaughan Williams's festival contribution in these three years.

1. Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1954), p.134.

2. Alain Frogley, Ed. Julian Onderdonk, '*Vaughan Williams's Transcriptions*', *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), p.119

3.Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (George G. Harrap & Co Ltd, London, 1950), p.57

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day. Vaughan Williams's opinions emerge from a small collection of letters

by Helen Corkery

The small collection of letters from Vaughan Williams to the late Mrs Joyce Hooper (see commemorative articles, Journal of the RVW Society, February 2002) referred in the main to arrangements connected with the Leith Hill Festival and other local performances. Covering the years 1939 or 1940 to 1958 the letters went from "Yours sincerely, R. Vaughan Williams" to "Love from Uncle Ralph", and would Joyce sing the alto solo "It is finished" from the *St John Passion* for 3 guineas, and subsequently for 5 guineas? (1953). Would she "come to the rescue" and rehearse the Leith Hill choirs while Vaughan Williams was away? For this he wrote a letter of thanks: "I hear the practice was much enjoyed and that you 'put them through it' which was good for them and which I am too lazy to do." One can hardly believe the concluding remark.

The letters are typically almost illegible though some are typed and one, as confirmed by Hugh Cobbe and Roy Douglas, was in Adeline Vaughan Williams' handwriting. The letters were accepted for the British Library, by Hugh Cobbe, Head of Music Collections, in 1998. With them was a *Times* review (unsigned) of a performance of the *St John Passion* conducted by Vaughan Williams at Dorking in 1953, and also a notice from the BBC, dated 23 September 1939, regretfully cancelling a proposed broadcast by Joyce, entitled "Four Voices", because of the outbreak of war earlier that month.

But among these brief, business-like items is a long, typed letter in which Vaughan Williams clearly states some of his dearly held views and reveals some of his innermost thoughts. It is reproduced here in full and it may be remembered that in the early decades of the twentieth century Vaughan Williams was associated not only with the survival of English folk song but also with the accompanying move to rescue the English country dance tradition from the threat of extinction.

The White Gates,
Dorking, Surrey.
Telephone: Dorking 3055. 31st. October, 1951.

Dear Mrs. Hooper,

I am amazed to hear that some members of your choir have taken exception to the beautiful words of Holst's "Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day", apparently on the grounds firstly, that dancing and religion are something apart and ~~consequently~~ secondly that it is wrong to use the words "This have I done for my true love" in connection with a statement of the central doctrines of Christianity.

I had hoped that the killjoy and lugubrious view of religion which once obtained was now happily dead, but I fear there are still some people who have a degraded view of the dance and connect it only with high kicking and jazz, but the dance in its highest manifestations shares with music, poetry and painting, one of the greatest means of expression of the very highest of human aspirations. The dance has always been connected with religious fervour - that is, orderly and rhythmical movement surcharged with emotion.

What are the great Church ceremonies but a sublimation of the dance? What about the 150th.Psalm, "Praise Him with the timbrel and dances"? Surely Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is full of the highest religious fervour and he makes Mr. Ready-to-Halt celebrate his deliverance by dancing.

One of the most beautiful books of the Apocrypha, the Gospel of Niccodemus, contains in "The Hymn of Jesus" an apotheosis of the dance, "divine grace is dancing, dance ye therefore."

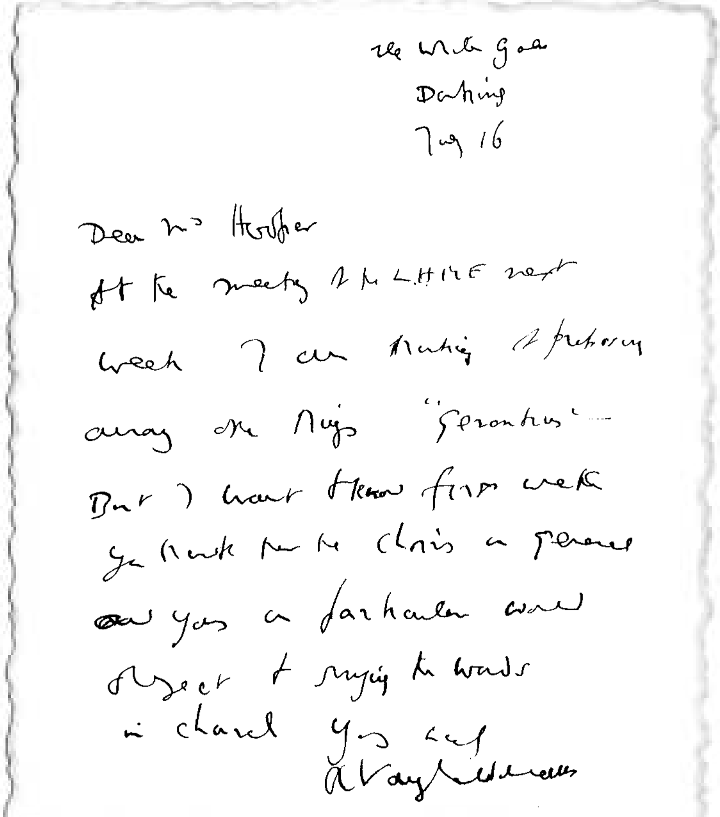
As regards my other point, human love has always been taken as a symbol of man's relationship to divine things. The Song of Solomon has been treated in all the Churches as a symbol of the relationship of God to man. And what about Isaiah and his "beloved's Vineyard"? And is not the Church in the Book of Revelations always symbolised as the bride?

Let me conclude with a practical suggestion. I should advise all those who do not feel themselves worthy to sing the beautiful words of this carol, to vocalise, and to leave the words to those singers who have not this inhibition. But if they do this they will miss a great spiritual experience.

Yours sincerely,

R Vaughan Williams

(R. Vaughan Williams)



TELEPHONE AMBASSADOR 8200

FROM R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS,
10, HANOVER TERRACE,
REGENTS PARK,
LONDON, N.W.1.

June 29th 1958.

Dear Joyce,

The John Passion next year - 1959 - will be on Saturday, February 14th, rehearsal 2.30, performance 7pm. I do hope you will be able to sing the alto solo as you have so often done before.

Love from,

Uncle Ralph

Record Reviews

Review of '*CanTUBAllada*' a CD produced by a German company, Valve-Hearts, as V-H 3102.

This CD is well worth consideration for your collection, not only for the fine performance of RVW's *Tuba Concerto*, but also for the carefully selected range of other items, most of which are likely to be unfamiliar. There are two pieces, including another *Tuba Concerto* composed in 1976 by Edward Gregson, a British composer born in 1945, and three pieces by Jan Van der Roost (born 1956), who also conducts the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra on the CD.

Recordings of RVW's *Tuba Concerto*, a late composition in 1954, are hardly common. I have the Chandos CD of 1989, with Patrick Harrill on tuba, and Bryden Thomson conducting the LSO. To my ears the tuba sound on that recording has rather a muffled, woolly sound, although I know others admire it - *Gramophone* magazine's reviewer in September 1989 described it as 'the best on record'. There is also a classic earlier recording with Philip Catalinet and the LSO conducted by Barbirolli, and another with John Fletcher conducted by Previn, neither of which I have heard. But this new recording really made me sit up and listen with constant pleasure. The tuba is played by Hans Nickel whose skill and musicality are displayed to excellent effect for RVW and the other tuba works on the CD. His tone is wonderfully focused, and the balancing between tuba and orchestra is beautifully judged. It all made me realise what a gem this brief work really is. I particularly like the middle movement, another of RVW's *Romanzas*. This is taken a little faster here - at exactly 5 minutes - than by Thomson/Harrill, and I think gains greatly by that. So I believe RVW fans will want to acquire this CD for this item.

But there's more to come, far more. I had not heard any of Edward Gregson's music before, although I had noticed intermittently in the background (I was concentrating on some paperwork at the time) a few passages of his *Clarinet Concerto*, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 as recently as the 11th February by Michael Collins (clarinet) with Martyn Brabbins conducting the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. It sounded interesting and I hope to have another opportunity of hearing it. Anyway, Gregson's *Tuba Concerto* on this CD is certainly a worthwhile discovery. There is a graceful musical quote from RVW's concerto about halfway through the first movement, although Gregson's, composed 22 years after RVW's, has a distinct character of its own. Overall there is, I think, more stress on the ruminative gloomy side of the tuba sound, where RVW finds more gruff cheerfulness in it. The Gregson can be thought of as a younger cousin of the RVW, respecting harmonic tradition but looking for adventure too. It is an excellent idea to have combined them on a single CD.

There are two tuba solo 7 - 8 minute showpieces, *Alarum* by Gregson and *CanTUBAllada* by Jan Van der Roost. These are in much more modern idiom than the concertos and are performed brilliantly by Hans Nickel. And there are two orchestral pieces by Jan Van der Roost. *Per Archi* opens the CD. Composed for string orchestra and paying homage to Benjamin Britten and Béla Bartók, it is an attractive two-part suite in mid-20th century style. And the rather lovely 10 minute, 4 movement *Rikudim* at the end was inspired by Jewish dances, 'making use', as the excellent accompanying booklet says, 'of eastern-style intervals, coloured instrumentation (in the woodwinds) and irregular rhythms'.

I think listeners will find much to enjoy here. The CD might not be found in every CD shop, but it can be obtained direct for 20 euros plus postage.

Here are the contact possibilities:

Website: www.valve-hearts.com
Tel: 0049 221 9545811
(there is an answerphone)
Fax: 0049 221 9545810
Email: valve-hearts@t-online.de
Mail: Valve-Hearts Distribution,
Stolberger Straße 3,
50933 Cologne,
Germany

David Betts

Barbirolli's Live 8th with the Hallé on BBC Legends (BBCL 4100-2) (coupled with Bax *Oboe Quintet,* Rawsthorne *Street Corner Overture,* Elgar *Land of Hope and Glory*

There are several other pieces on this disc, all of which were reviewed in February's journal by Mark Asquith; the present review seeks only to add a comment or two regarding the recording of the *Eighth Symphony*.

As Mr. Asquith has already pointed out, the sound quality of this disc leaves much to be desired. What might be shocking to members of the society, however, was that the first five times I listened to it, I didn't even notice the hiss or crackle, so gripped was I by the performance. In fact, I wrote an entire review of the disc, lauding the recording quality as well as the performance, only to go back, listen again with more sober ears, and tear up my first review. The performance, however, is another matter.

This is simply the best performance of the *Eighth* I have ever heard, and I say this with sobriety, after having listened to it regularly for nearly three months. The first movement, with all of its complexities and enigmas, is perfectly paced. Its opening is jarred a bit by the late entrance of the celesta, but this is the only glaring flaw. The *presto* after rehearsal number [3] (in the score) perfectly contrasts to the opening material, with its vigorous rhythms and attacks, setting the stage for the first great revelation of this recording, which comes at the *andante sostenuto* after rehearsal [9]. Barbirolli follows the phrasings so meticulously that the simple beauty of the line is allowed to come through. By contrast, other conductors don't seem to make this effort, and as a result the line is most frequently played as a mere sustained legato. Until this recording I had not fully appreciated this moment. Another revelation comes on the downbeat of rehearsal [19]. The divisi of the strings is played with such authority that the result is a sudden bright wash of sound preparing the way for the full orchestral *ff* of the second beat. This is both startling and beautiful. Furthermore it makes musical sense of an otherwise difficult transition.

The second movement is equally good. Particularly enjoyable is the way Barbirolli follows the line of the bassoons from the opening of their *soli* to the long sustained low C in the second bassoon. This movement contains fewer revelations though, as it is more easily approached and has been recorded very well by other groups.

As in the first movement, the third movement phrasings are followed in all of their intricacies. This is important, as they are often, on other recordings, in danger of being treated in a "mere legato" manner. Barbirolli ensures that we will enjoy all of the subtle rhythmic complexities of the movement.

Having said all of this, the fourth movement may contain the greatest revelations, albeit the

most difficult to describe. The tempo is on the slower side, yet, paradoxically, the orchestra plays with more "lift" than the faster versions. The percussion doesn't feel ponderous, but adds constant bursts of light to the texture. Even in Barbirolli's first (studio) recording of this piece it seems as though the percussion is grafted onto the score, rather than an integral part of it, but here the sensation is analogous to the effect of a great jazz drummer (like Elvin Jones)—the timbre itself becomes melodic. I have never heard this in a symphony before. Overall, this recording reveals all of the darkness, light, and complexities of a spiritual journey that I had never before suspected. Perhaps more significantly, my one year old son claps enthusiastically with the audience every time we listen to it together. If that doesn't convince you all to buy it, I don't know what will.

Eric Seddon

I will lift up mine eyes
***The Old Hundredth*, with choral works by Finzi, Parry, Ireland, Duruflé, Bainton and others Choir of St Clement Danes, St Clement Danes Brass, Peter Long on Classical Recording Company CRC 1223-2**

A compelling mix of the known and relatively unknown. I was impressed with Bainton's *And I saw a new Heaven* taking the same text from the *Book of Revelations* as RVW did in *Sancta Civitas.* It is performed here with great conviction by the Choir of St Clement Danes. Another highlight is Ireland's *Greater Love Hath No Man.* Finzi's radiant *God is gone up* opens the collection in fine style, whilst Vaughan Williams's robust setting of *The Old Hundredth* rounds off the collection. For those sensitive to this repertoire, this CD is recommended.

Stephen Connock

Dame Janet Baker *Let Beauty Awake, Tired, Silent Noon, Linden Lea,* with songs by Finzi, Berkeley, Britten, Warlock and others on BBC Music, BBCL 4117-2

This memorable recital by Janet Baker and Geoffrey Parsons takes off for me with Finzi's marvellous cycle *Let us Garlands Bring*. Dame Janet brings her special artistry to this music, identifying with the spirit of each song. *Come away, come away, death* is suitably sombre, contrasting brilliantly with *Who is Sylvia?* The heart of the cycle is *Fear no more the heat of the sun* and Janet Baker is utterly convincing in her live performance from the Cheltenham Festival of 1983, as is Geoffrey Parsons. The rise and fall of Finzi's deeply felt response to Shakespeare is superbly realised – this performance is worth the price of the disc alone. I urge all members to hear this cycle in this wonderful interpretation.

What of the Vaughan Williams? *Let Beauty Awake,* taken slightly more slowly than usual, is impressive as the singer seems to think through the meaning of the words anew. Quite lovely. *Tired* (from *Four Last Songs)*, *Silent Noon* and *Linden Lea* are all quite special. Dame Janet's understanding of the text and of Vaughan Williams's often subtle response to the poetry is unforgettably realised.

Very strongly recommended.

Stephen Connock.

The Songs of Vaughan Williams
Songs from *The House of Life, Four Last Songs, Linden Lea, The Sky above the Roof, Dreamland, Claribel, If I were a Queen, Four Poems by Fredegond Shove, Adieu, Think of me, Along the Field*. Ruth Golden (soprano), Levering Rothfuss (piano) Nancy Bean (violin) on Decca

This recital first appeared in 1993 and was important for the inclusion of *Along the Field* as well as rare VW songs such as *Dreamland, Claribel* and *The Sky above the Roof.* Ruth Golden's tone is sometimes too thin and her identification with the text cannot match that of Janet Baker. This is particularly noticeable in *Tired.* However, overall this recording, newly revised on Decca's British Music Collection, is a rewarding one. Byron Adams provides a thoughtful and enjoyable note in the booklet.

Stephen Connock.

Folksong Arrangements
The Captain's Apprentice, As I walked out, Bushes and Briars, Geordie, On Board a Ninety-Eight, The Ploughman, The Brewer, Rolling in the Dew
(with arrangements by Benjamin Britten) Robert Tear (tenor), Philip Ledger (piano) on HMV Classics 5 73448 2 (bargain priced)

Amazing what you can find at Luton Airport these days! At less than £4.00 here was Robert Tear's superb singing of favourite RVW folksong arrangements. Members may well recall the original LP, called *As I walked out* – a much-loved LP of the late 1970s (HQS 1412). The first eight tracks of this LP are reproduced here; sadly the arrangements with violin including the remarkable *The Unquiet Grave* are omitted. Instead there are 19 of Britten's folksong arrangements, also from a 70s LP.

Robert Tear was at the height of his vocal ability at this period. The voice is wonderfully lyrical, rounded and expressive. His characterisation of each song seems to be just right, especially the poignant *Captain's Apprentice* and the more extrovert *On Board a Ninety-Eight.*

At £7.00 for two CDs from this series, I purchased two copies of these folksong arrangements. I'm not sure if this was the intention of the offer, but members will understand!

Stephen Connock

Concert Reviews

Three Cheers !

Sir Andrew Davis, Richard Woodhams and Frank Staneck

Three Cheers for Sir Andrew Davis, Richard Woodhams and The Philadelphia Orchestra for a splendid concert series on the 3rd, 4th and 7th of January 2003.

The concert opened with Elgar's *In the South* where the orchestra sailed majestically through the rich and colourful score under Sir Andrew's baton. Next came Elgar's *Soliloquy*, for oboe and orchestra, arranged for oboe solo, strings, flute and clarinet by Gordon Jacob from the original piano and oboe version. Oboe soloist Richard Woodhams poignantly played this touching little gem that lasts just under four minutes.

Soliloquy served well as a lovely prelude for Vaughan Williams's *Concerto in A minor for Oboe and Strings*. The famed Philadelphia strings were glowing as was Mr. Woodhams who played with authority and eloquence throughout the work. From the soaring high register to the darker textures of the low end through all the varieties of mood and feeling he well captured the essence of this wonderful work. All who love RVW's *Oboe Concerto* would have thoroughly enjoyed this excellent performance. The audience did enjoy it, and showed it, as they provided a sustained ovation allowing Sir Andrew and Richard Woodhams several curtain calls, thus concluding the first half of the programme on quite a high note.

The second half featured music of sunny Italy in two of Respighi's most famous works: *The Fountains of Rome* and *The Pines of Rome*. The orchestra played marvelously under Sir Andrew's direction and these two pieces brought the concert to a dramatic conclusion, warming us all on a frosty January evening in Philadelphia.

Frank James Staneck
Collingswood, New Jersey

***Riders to the Sea* at the Royal College of Music**

On 26 February, the RCM Students' Association held an *Evening of Opera and Song* at the RCM Concert Hall, performed by soloists from the Royal College, and accompanied by the RCM Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Timothy Henty.

The programme opened with Samuel Barber's *A Hand of Bridge* op.1, a short opera written for four solo voices and chamber orchestra. Apart from being set to a text by Menotti and premiered on 17 June 1959 at Spoleto, little appears to be known about this captivating work. It begins with introducing a game of bridge between two married couples. What follows is a snapshot into the thoughts and desires of the characters as they each sing an aria. Katrina Waters' performance as Sally, a wife who desires material possessions, was compelling although at times it was difficult to hear her words. This was followed by Sally's husband's fantasy for other women, sung by Robert Murray. Clare Surman gave a gripping performance as Geraldine, a middle-aged women who reflects on her mother's illness, and James Harrison sung David, a businessman who longs for money and power. The work concludes with each character singing fragments of their arias and ends somewhat abruptly.

Simon Wallfisch (baritone), accompanied by Rachael Bennett on piano, performed two songs composed by Helena Thomas, a third year student at the Royal College. *Requiescat* and *Silentium Amoris* are highly charged settings of Oscar Wilde's poetry about lost love and Wallfisch's performance effectively conveyed the melancholic mood of the texts.

The evening concluded with an excellent performance of Vaughan Williams's *Riders to the Sea*. Set to the text of J.M. Synge, this one act opera for five soloists received its first public performance at the Royal College on 1 December 1937. The drama takes place on an austere island off the west coast of Ireland. An old woman, Maurya, has lost five sons in sailing accidents. Her two daughters, Nora and Cathleen, inform her that their brother Michael has also been killed at sea. Despite attempts to prevent her remaining son, Bartley, from enduring the same fate, he leaves to travel by boat to buy horses. The opera ends with the return of his deceased body.

Wendy Dawn Thompson gave a moving performance as Maurya, effectively conveying the angst of a bereaved mother. Sophie Bevan and Laura Pooley also gave strong performances as the two daughters, although attempts at Irish accents resulted in places where it was difficult to hear their diction. Sebastian Valentine, who sang Bartley, exhibited good vocal tone and gave a captivating performance. The wordless female chorus in the final section, sung by members of the RCM chorus, created a haunting atmosphere and effectively summoned Maurya's solo Adagio lament.

The RCM's *Evening of Opera and Song* was immensely enjoyable. The varied programme not only catered for a range of tastes but also displayed the immense musical talents being fostered within the Royal College.

Lorna Gibson

Clevelanders perform *Dona Nobis Pacem* at last

On January 16th, 17th, and 18th, the Cleveland Orchestra and Chorus, under new Maestro Franz Welser-Möst, performed, for the first time, Vaughan Williams's *Dona Nobis Pacem.* The programme also included Strauss's *Tod und Verklarung* and *Four Last Songs*.

The event was much anticipated, not only by ardent RVW supporters like myself, but also by the critic for *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland's biggest newspaper), Donald Rosenberg. In his Sunday column, five days prior to the premier, Rosenberg praised both Welser-Möst's programme and the piece itself, suggesting that it was high time this British master's music was performed in Cleveland. Also, according to the same article, it marked the first time Welser-Möst had conducted the piece. I attended Friday's performance.

At the performance, Dame Felicity Lott sang the imploring prayer for peace which begins, ends, and runs throughout the work. Her tone was perfectly suited for the music, being strong yet not heavy (a quality which I find essential to this music). Rodney Gilfry's baritone was a good compliment to Lott's soprano. His singing was dramatic without being extroverted, and in particular his rendering of John Bright's words "The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land (etc.)" at the beginning of movement V was chillingly effective.

The greatest surprise of the evening, however, was the altogether remarkable performance of the Cleveland Orchestra's Chorus, who, from their very first cataclysmic "Dona" in the first movement to their final hushed "Pacem" in the last, demonstrated their fitness and enthusiasm for RVW's piece. For one who has only enjoyed this piece by means of recordings, the sheer wall of sound created by the chorus was awesome.

The cries of "Beat, Beat, Drums!" filled Severance Hall with a power that sought out every crevice of the place, and the blast was not dampened by distance (I was overwhelmed by their force three rows from the very back of the upper balcony). This wave of vocal power, however, was not allowed to run completely unharnessed. Immediately they were able to pull back to the subtlest *p* of the third movement, articulating beautifully that most poignant mixture of alliteration, commas and internal rhyme "...incessantly, softly, wash again and ever again this soiled world." The soprano descant for the return of "Word over all, beautiful as the sky" was as effortless as a lullaby.

But perhaps the greatest achievement for the chorus was the "Dirge for two veterans." Their articulation was so crisp, and phrasing so good, that subtleties of Vaughan Williams's settings were revealed which I had never heard before. One such moment occurred when they were singing Whitman's fifth stanza. The interweaving of lines expressing "Two veterans, son and father, dropped together" were executed so cleanly that one could hear every detail of the composer's thought. Much credit should be given to the Director of Choruses for the Cleveland Orchestra, Robert Porco, who certainly played a major role in preparing this concert.

Welser-Möst's control over the musical material was admirable throughout the performance, and his pacing was very good. His reading very much stressed, to a degree I have never felt before from recordings, the continuous quality and the overarching form of the piece. Particularly surprising to me were the soft, incessant dissonances uttered by the double-basses at certain points in the piece; never so incessant or noticeable on my recordings. His reading of the final movement was unusually brisk, building and increasing until the bursting forth of "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, so shall your seed and your name remain for ever." But even here, the conductor pressed on, not pulling back or relaxing the drive of the orchestra until after the final choral fortissimo of "good-will toward men." The performance came to a close with Dame Felicity's voice evoking all of the peace and faith that her last passage contains. Her final closed hum at the end of "pacem" hovered, slowly evaporating into the silence, where we sat, enraptured.

I hope members of the Society will forgive a review like this, with so many lauds. It was a major moment musically in this city that such a piece would be performed, and performed so well. Of course it was not without problems. Some of the brass at times sounded uneasy in their execution of certain figures, common in Vaughan Williams's idiom, but perhaps not so common yet to them. It was not so much an inability to play the figures (they are easily enough performed) but rather a stiffness of interpretation, as though they weren't completely sure of the meaning or direction of the gestures. This can only be remedied by familiarity, and we can hope that Maestro Welser-Möst helps them in this regard with more programs of this sort in his future tenure. Another troublesome feature of this concert was the programme order itself. The *Dona Nobis Pacem* was the only piece in the first half, while the second half contained first *Tod und Verklarung,* followed, without applause, by the *Four Last Songs*, performed by Dame Felicity. The effect was rather of anti-climax; of an evening of sustained decrescendo. I'm not sure why the programme would be ordered this way, in seemingly reverse order, except that perhaps the director felt the audience unready to experience a piece by Vaughan Williams as the highlight of the evening. Here in America, it is still quite common for concert goers and musicians alike to consider the Germanic repertoire to be the "real" repertoire, and the rest to be somehow of a lesser quality. I hope this was not the case in Mr. Welser-Möst's programming decision, and I would have preferred to reverse the order, but all in all it was a remarkable evening, and I won't quibble where I should be thankful.

Eric Seddon

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

Splendid

What a splendid event '*A Special Flame*' turned out to be. What impressed me the most was the complete absence of 'competition' between members of the RVW Society and the Elgar Society. I felt I learnt a great deal about both composers. This was largely due to the total impartiality in the presentations. Well done to all concerned.

What now about more cross Society events? How about the Delius Society or groups representing Walton, Rawsthorne or Constant Lambert?

Robert Rush
London

A Pastoral Elegy Symphony?

It was through listening to *A Pastoral Symphony* that I became hooked on the music of Vaughan Williams. It was like nothing I had heard before. To find our more about VW, I read Ursula Vaughan Williams' *R.V.W.* In that book, I read that VW had written to Ursula in 1938 telling her that the symphony is "really war-time music – a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night with the ambulance wagon at Ecoivres and went up a steep hill and there was a wonderful Carot-like landscape in the sunset - it's not really lambkins frisking at all as most people take for granted." Ecoivres is a city in France where VW was stationed in 1916 as an orderly in the British Expeditionary Force during the 1914-18 War. I became so fascinated with this description that in 1999 I went with Stephen Connock and others to Ecoivres, France to try to recapture what inspired VW in 1916.

On numerous occasions, I have wondered why VW called it *A Pastoral Symphony*. Possible reasons are (1) it was a pastoral landscape in France that helped inspire the symphony, (2) the dead of the war have a pastoral burial place in France, and (3) it was a pastoral setting in Britain that was lost through the slaughter of the Great War.

While studying the poetry of John Milton, I recently discovered another, more technical, meaning of the term "pastoral." John Milton wrote a poem called *Lycidas*, which is an example of a pastoral elegy. A pastoral elegy is a lament for a dead friend. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (3rd Ed. 1975), p. 652, explains that a pastoral elegy "uses the sometimes artificial imagery supplied by an idyllic shepherd's existence to bewail the loss of a friend. Among its many predecessors in the Renaissance and in classical antiquity are poems by Spencer, Ronsard, Castiglione, Mantuan, Petrarch, Virgil, Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion; its successors include poems like *Adonais* by Shelley and *Thyrsis* by Matthew Arnold."

A pastoral elegy is a poetic lament for the dead. Is it possible that VW intended *A Pastoral Symphony* as a symphonic pastoral elegy? The haunting soprano in the fourth movement coupled with VW's 1938 letter to Ursula leaves no doubt in my mind that it is a lament for the dead of the Great War. VW was classically educated and continued to read literature following his years at Cambridge. It would not be surprising if he had this understanding of the word "pastoral."

Possible support for this theory might be found in markings in VW's books in Ursula's study and in his papers relating to the writing of *A Pastoral Symphony*. I hope this letter will encourage someone with access to these books and papers to further research this issue.

Alan Aldous
Beaverton, Oregon

Hugh the Drover

I was another RVW Society member who travelled to Peterborough for the performance of *Hugh the Drover* – I greatly enjoyed it and am grateful to Peterborough Opera for providing the rare opportunity fully to experience this important work. However I do have to say that I can now appreciate why it is so seldom performed.

In my estimation "*Hugh*" is not only a Ballad Opera but also, by reason of its story line, a classic example of *verismo* on the Puccini model. We all know how incongruous *La Boheme* can appear to be when the principals, who are meant to be typical students, are played by more mature singers.

I know *Hugh the Drover* well by listening to recordings and my own mental picture has Hugh himself as a virile young cowboy, Mary as a naive

teenager and John as a sort of football hooligan. Particularly for this opera I think visual realism is a very important factor in the presentation of RVW's gorgeous music. At Peterborough the soloists' singing was first class and the whole production was great fun - but it still didn't look right.

D. G. Arundale

Threat to Holst Museum

The Holst Birthplace Museum was saved from closure when the new Conservative-led council came in at Cheltenham, but it seems even their loyalty is now in question as they propose to withdraw their subsidy. I find it incredible that politicians are so blinkered, even the local ones who would, you would have thought, have recognised the golden egg on their doorstep! Apparently tourists from Japan and the USA make a bee-line for the Museum, even if the British either don't know who composed *The Planets*, or think Holst was a German!

Perhaps you could give the appeal a little publicity in the Journal?

Alan Gibbs

How to follow RVW No. 6

In your October 1996 issue I wrote of the RVW *Sixth* that "The later works of the composer fortify one against its desolation." Some of us may gain such spiritual strength via other routes too, and find an exit from what Gwyn Parry-Jones aptly called its "Slough of Despond" marooning. (July 1995). The intense Andrew Davis performance was given this morning (27 February) in "*The Week's Composer*" on Radio 3; and the "disc-jockey" then pondered on "what it could be followed by." He added that RVW turned to the Scott expedition and its human fortitude.

But with marvellous inappropriateness the "CD Masters" programme began, as soon as he had finished, with Glinka's *Russlan and Ludmilla* overture, which exorcised the "ultimate nihilism" (Deryck Cooke) by sheer force majeure, on the instant so far as I personally was influenced!

Frank McManus

Letter from Australia

I am very sad to tell you that Sir Frank Callaway (he was 83) died on 22 February (the centenary of the death of Hugo Wolf). I last saw him just before Christmas when although physically very frail, his mind was as active and alert as ever, his cheerful friendliness, memory (of much details of past performances and long ago students) and sense of humour unimpaired. It has been a great privilege to get to know him, even though only at the end of his long life. I was put in touch with him four years ago, as the only other W.A. member of the Peter Warlock Society – he immediately greeted me as if I was an old friend. I helped sorting his Warlock archives and was much honoured that he and his wife attended a concert of my music that was a celebration of my 65th birthday in June 2000. (I was enormously grateful at his approval of the music). In due course I will obtain the very long list of RVW works he conducted with the UWA Choral and WA Orchestra. At his 80th birthday, Charles Soothwood, a leading presenter on ABC Classic FM, recorded an interview with him. I missed it being in England at the time. Charles, a former student of my wife's, after I told him of Frank's death, paid a fine tribute to him on radio. The last time I saw Frank he spoke warmly of how well Charles had done the earlier interview. It is likely to be re-broadcast here soon. His wife Kathleen, (they celebrate their Diamond Wedding in November) was a fine pianist and accompanist to UWACS which Frank conducted (and which I joined last year). Bev and I attended the funeral this morning. Wonderful tributes were paid to him by his sons, grandsons and by David Tunley, his successor as Professor of Music at UWA. The final hymn was *For All the Saints* – most fitting for one who did so much for RVW's music in WA.

Three observations on the latest (excellent as ever) RVWS Journal (No. 26)

1. *The Poisoned Kiss* article will enable me to listen much more appreciatively to the CDs made of the recent live performance by the Oxford and Cambridge Music Society.

2. P.16: Britten certainly did not invent the "anthology work" (p.16). Arthur Bliss may be the originator: The *Pastoral* (Lie Strewn the White Flocks) of 1928 (my mother took part in the first performance, and I have been in performances in 1962 and 1996) has texts from Ancient Greece, as well as modern poets like Robert Nicholls, also the compilers. I think this is Bliss's greatest work. The ambitious Choral Symphony *Morning Heroes* (1930) is also an anthology work. The precedent that *Dona Nobis Pacem* provided for the *War Requiem* is interesting. I prefer the earlier work! (It is due for performance in June by the Collegium Musicum Choir here). I think VW's experiences in WW1 Medical Corps must have given him a close insight into Whitman, with his similar ambulance experiences in the Civil War.

3. The article on the parallels between *Rake's* and *Pilgrim's Progresses* and *Carmelites* was fascinating. Members interested to read more background to the *Carmelites* opera may find Richard D E Burton's book *Francis Poulenc* (Absolute Press 2002) worth investigating. As for RVW's religious beliefs, or lack of them, each writer naturally tends to be influenced by their own philosophy. I am glad that at a time when people of many religions are seeking common ground in spirituality rather than separation by dogma, that this may steadily become less of an issue.

Members may also like to know that the CDs published to go with Tim Winton's recent novel *Dirt Music* include the slow movement of the *Fifth Symphony.* Winton is a WA resident and this like his others (eg *Cloud Street*) is set in WA – he is one of Australia's best writers.

Another Journal reference (p.14): I wonder how RVW would have reacted to his *Fourth Symphony* being so unfavourably compared to Mahler, as well as to Beethoven and Mozart, in view of his aversion to Mahler. And how do members place the RVW Symphonies, in relation to the other great 20C symphonies (Sibelius, Nielson, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, as well as Mahler)?

Tony Noakes
Western Australia

Scott of the Antarctic

Following the review of the Chandos CD of *Scott of the Antarctic*, *Coastal Command* and *The People's Land*, in your last issue I feel obliged to make some observations about the 'premiere recording' of the 'complete version' of *Scott of the Antarctic*. I have looked forward with eager anticipation for some years for a complete recording of this important work in VW's output, and I was delighted to purchase the CD soon after it was released. Chandos claims to have recorded the 'complete' music to the film on this CD; however, this is not in fact the case. Reference to the original VW manuscripts in the British Library demonstrates the absence of the following movements from the CD:

Scene	Title	BL Add. MS 59537
3	'Oriana'	ff. 7v.-9r.
7	Alternative 'Sculpture Scene'	ff. 12r.-13r.
11	'Nansen'	ff. 15v.-16v.
12	'Scott and Oates'	f. 17r.
13	'Office'	ff. 17v.-18r.
16	'Departure of the Ship' [the orig. version in the MS]	ff.19r.-22v.
17	'Amundsen' [actually used in Scene 22 in the film]	ff. 23r.-23v.
21	'Ross Island'	ff.35v.-36r.
24	'Aurora'	ff. 37r.-38r.
27	'Snow/Pony March and Parhelion'	ff. 44r.-47v.
28	'Pony March II'	ff. 48r.-49v.
33	'Scott comes out'	ff. 63r.-64v.
35	'Kathleen [III]'	f. 69r.
36	'Polar party moves off'/'Last Lap'	ff. 69v.-73v.
36	'No. 101 March [Alternative for Polar party moves off]	ff. 97r.-98v.
37	'Amundsen III ('Black Flag')	ff. 74r.-74v.
38	'Base Camp'	ff. 75r.-76v.
46	'Only Eleven Miles'	f. 92v.

As can be seen, this represents a substantial amount of material still unrecorded. Indeed, fragments of several of the above movements do appear in the final cut of the film. This is quite disheartening, considering the CD's claim. I can only deduce that the primary source, i.e. BL Add. MS 59537, was not consulted in preparation for this recording. Moreover,

several of the movements have been truncated (notably the last 13 bars of 'Pony March' [track 9], and the last 9 bars of 'Blizzard' [track 10], as in the film itself). Furthermore, there are a couple of glaring errors in the orchestral parts of this recording, notably in 'Ice Floes' and in the 'End Titles', which consultation with the original MS and the film itself (or the later *Sinfonia Antartica*) confirms. I also wonder why it was felt necessary to transcribe and edit No. 2, 'Antarctic Prologue', when VW's original survives complete, albeit dispersed between BL Add. MS 52289B, ff. 3v.-6r. and BL Add. MS 59537, f. 7r.?

Dismayed at what I had found, I wrote to Chandos to see if they could shed any light on these issues. I received a phone call a few days later admitting that the designation of 'complete version' of the music was a 'printing error', and I could only deduce from the ensuing conversation that they had referred mostly to copy scores of the music in preparation for the recording, and not to the original British Library sources. While I share Michael Gainsford's and Michael Nelson's delight at hearing some of this music for the first time, this recording gives a less than full impression of VW's original design for the film, and so we still await a record company brave enough to give us a true complete version of the 1,000 bars of this fascinating music.

Christopher J Parker

Good days for RVW in USA

Your members will know that the recording of RVW's *Sea Symphony* by Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra with Christine Goerke and Brett Polegato won three Grammy Awards - Best Classical Album, Best Choral Performance, Best Engineered Classical Album. It is also one of the top 50 CDs on Amazon.com. Recently our occasional arts channel on cable featured two spots with RVW's music, one was a "ballet without dance" called *Williamsburg*, the *Tallis Fantasia* and spot called *100 Masterpieces in Music and Art* which featured *Greensleeves* as music for a tour of one of Constable's paintings. Good days for RVW in the USA.

Pam Blevins

Household Music

In Journal No. 26, p.23 *(Household Music)*, Mr Martin Murray mentions three hymns. The one referred to as "*St Denis*" should have been "*St Denio*". In Wales it is called "*Joanna*" and

1. Was used by William Mathias in his musical *Musical Morality - Jonah* (1988)
2. Was played (30.7.00) in Glamis Castle during the Queen Mother's 100th birthday celebrations.
3. Was played (9.4.02) at her Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey.

Aberystwyth is known the world over being sung to *Jesus, lover of my soul. Crug-y-bar* has connections with deep emotional religious events in Wales. Maybe they are "not over-familiar tunes" to Mr Murray but VW saw what feelings they did, and would, stir.

Graham Morris
Port Talbot

Train-spotting

I was very interested to hear from a train-spotting friend that an electric locomotive has been named "Vaughan Williams".

As these engines can, if necessary, work through the Tunnel, they have been named after English and French composers and writers and places.

The only thing is that, with two exceptions, they have rather tacky stick-on transfers. (Ashford and Charles Dickens are cast aluminium, I believe).

Do you think any members of the RVW Society would be interested in a 'whip-round' to get some proper name plates cast? The owners of the locomotive, an American company, would have to be persuaded to fit them!

John Clark

Suite de Ballet

Has anyone yet noticed that the *Suite de Ballet* (from the new Early Chamber works CD set) contains music that was later used in *Old King Cole*? The *Gavotte,* in particular, contains several themes from the Ballet. This is altogether reasonable, considering the title. The date of this composition has been uncertain. It was found with RVW's papers after his death. These resemblances to the Ballet are why Roy Douglas originally thought that the work was written in 1923 or 24. Kennedy, in his booklet notes, does not mention these resemblances to *King Cole*. He postulates that the work was written as early as 1913 because that is when RVW met the flautist Louis Fleury, who first performed the work. Despite this, isn't it possible, considering these resemblances, that the work was written closer in time to the Ballet? Kennedy states that the first performance was in 1920. I would guess that the work was probably written closer to that date. Also of interest: I saw the film *The Forty-ninth Parallel* (1942) for the first time not long ago. As most members know, RVW wrote the music. Has anyone ever noticed that there is a theme in one of the early scenes that he later used as the main theme of the *Scherzo* second movement of the *Violin Sonata* of 1954? Very interesting!

Tim Arena

Geoffrey Soul

I have heard from the family that Geoffrey Soul has died of pneumonia after a very short illness at the age of 93. He was bright and alert almost to the end.

As you know, Geoffrey and Ivy have been devoted to the music of Vaughan Williams for very many years: indeed, Ivy served on the Council of the EFDS during VW's lifetime. Both have been stalwart supporters of the Three Choirs Festival and of the VW Society. My wife and I met them at least 30 years ago through the Festival.

K J Burge

Bitter Springs

A couple of years ago we exchanged letters on the subject of Vaughan Williams's score for the film *Bitter Springs*. (Your reply dated 2 November 2000).

I thought you might be interested to know that I have recently seen *Bitter Springs.* The film itself is every bit as awful as its reputation suggests, but, of course, it was the music that I wanted to hear. The titles say: "Music by Vaughan Williams (no Ralph!) supplemented, arranged and directed by Ernest Irving." A couple of sequences don't sound like VW at all and are, presumably, Irving's own work; but for the most part the music is recognizably VW. What particularly caught my attention was a recurring five-note motiv which usually accompanied shots of a herd of sheep moving across a dry Australian landscape. It sounded very familiar because it is the tune, somewhat extended, upon which the last section of the *Ninth Symphony* is built.

The association with sheep made me think of *The Loves of Joanna Godden* for which VW wrote the score three years before *Bitter Springs.* I dug out the reissue of the music on the Pearl label, and there was the five-note motiv again in the "Sheep Shearing" sequence. I wonder if all three instances may have their origin in an early, lost work, perhaps inspired in some way by Thomas Hardy (which would help to explain the sheep.) No doubt others have already explored these connections, though I can't recall seeing anything in print.

If, as you believe, the score of *Bitter Springs* is in the British Museum Library, it might be worth considering for the Chandos series of VW film scores so auspiciously launched with the complete *Scott* music.

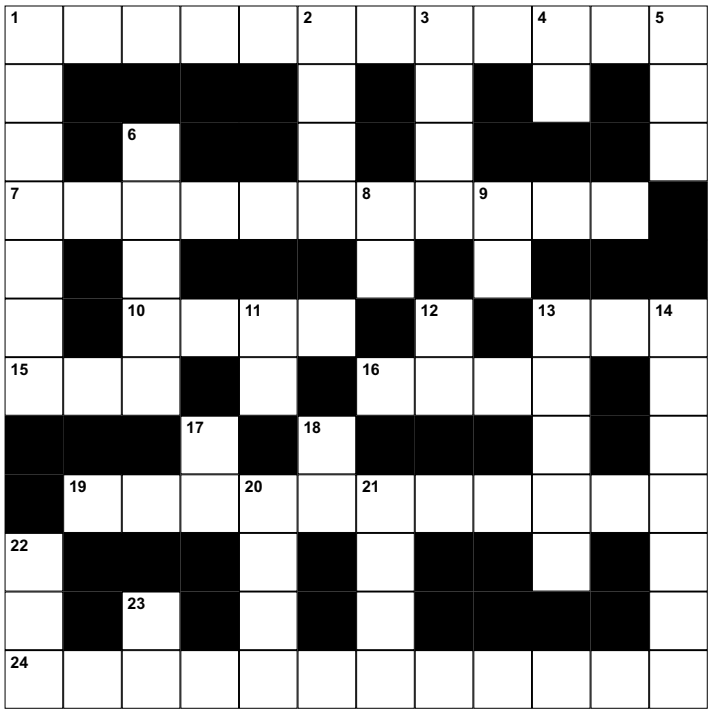
Hector Walker

Correction

Correction to Helen Corkery's letter which appeared in the February 2003 Journal:

Shropshire should read 'strophic' and 'turning the body' should read 'tuning the body'.

RVW Crossword No. 13 *by Michael Gainsford*



Across

1. Folk song, collected at Herongate in 1904, incorporated in *Scherzo* in same year. (2,1,6,3)
7. Three appear in Act 1 Scene 1 of *Pilgrim's Progress*. (7,4)
10. Alan, the dedicatee of *Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes*. (4)
13. Latin 'thus' (no doubt at Charterhouse Caesar was this in an omnibus!). (3)
15. My heart is laden with this in *Along the Field*. (3)
16. One of the insects in the overture of 1909. (4)
19. RVW's friend, k.i.a. on the Somme, 1916. (11)
24. *Third of Nine Carols for Male Voices*, of 1942 (7, 5)

Down

1. Mr MacAlpine who lamented in an air arranged in 1912. (7)
2. One of the supposed adversaries of the pilgrim in *Monk's Gate*. (4)
3. Reflection of sound. (4)
4. The two very exclusive letters after RVW's name. (1, 1)
5. The legwear was covered in this in the second of the *Folk Songs of the Eastern Counties*. (3)
6. Duet song for Fidele, of 1922. (5)
8. Plate on a car from UK. (1,1)
9. Note this well! (1, 1)
11. Initials of the very first Satan in *Job*. (1, 1)
12. Sixth degree of the sol-fa scale (2)
13. The point of the second *Study in English Folk Song*. (5)
14. Neville, the producer of the first performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. (7)
17. *Job* was a book in this.(1, 1)
18. Seventh degree of the sol-fa scale. (2)
20. Conductor of the first performance of *A Sea Symphony.* (4)
21. O, who is that who **** at my window? (Folk song). (4)
22. 1882 saw the composition of a childish overture to this opera. (3)
23. Initials of a Scots conductor much associated with RVW's film music. (1, 1)

Answers on Page 14

Next Edition: October 2003

Report from the Elgar/Vaughan Williams Symposium

The deadline for contributions is 10 August 2003

Call for Papers

The February 2004 edition of the Journal will focus on RVW and Hymn tunes.

The deadline for contributions is
10th December 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.