Journal of the
RVW
Society

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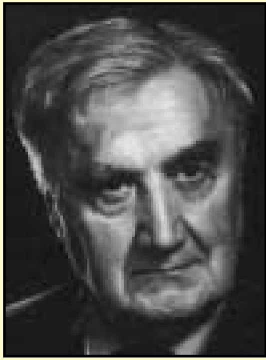

EDITOR
Stephen Connock
(see address below)

We are TEN – and still growing!

The RVW Society celebrated its 10th anniversary this July – just as we signed up our 1000th new member to mark a decade of growth and achievement. When John Bishop (still much missed), Robin Barber and I (Stephen Connock) came together to form the Society our aim was to widen appreciation of RVW's music, particularly through recordings of neglected but high quality music. Looking back, we feel proud of what we have achieved.

World premieres

Through our involvement with Richard Hickox, and Chandos, we have stimulated many fine world premiere recordings, including *The Poisoned Kiss*, *A Cotswold Romance*, *Norfolk Rhapsody No.2*, *The Death of Tintagiles* and the original version of *A London Symphony*. Our work on *The Poisoned Kiss* represents a special contribution as we worked closely with Ursula Vaughan Williams on shaping the libretto for the recording. And what beautiful music there is!

Medal of Honour

The Trustees sought to mark our Tenth Anniversary in a special way and decided to award an International *Medal of Honour* to people who have made a remarkable contribution to RVW's music. The first such Award was given to Richard Hickox during the concert in Gloucester Cathedral on Sunday 8th August. The Award itself is a superb David McFall relief, cast in bronze, and provided to us with the kind agreement of Alex McFall, the artist's widow. Richard Hickox warmly thanked the Society for this special Award and praised the Society's work over the last ten years, to an appreciative audience in the Cathedral, before going on to conduct a lovely performance of the original version of *A London Symphony*.

Towards 2008!

This special anniversary edition of the Journal will, we hope, give much pleasure to our members. The Trustees know there remains much to be done, especially in encouraging performances of RVW's music – as this year's Proms sadly show. We look forward with eagerness to the next major milestone - the 50th anniversary (in 2008) of Vaughan Williams's death. In the meantime, warm thanks to all those Trustees, Regional Chairmen and readers who have all played their part in our successful first ten years.

Picture of Richard holding the Award

In this issue...

- What RVW means to me Testimonials by sixteen members *from page 4*
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and more . . .

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Tenth Anniversary Celebrations – *Pictures for the Album*

The bronze relief by David McFall

Stephen Connock presents the Award to Richard Hickox on the stage at Gloucester Cathedral

Alex McFall, the artist's widow

The inscription on the back of the relief

Stephen Hogger, our guest speaker at a Three Choirs Festival event on 8 August, chats to Trustee Martin Murray

Ursula with Dawn and Frank Staneck, at our party on 8 August.
Frank is our Regional Chairman for USA

Stephen Connock, Richard Hickox and Ursula Vaughan Williams
in Gloucester on 8 August 2004.

Alex McFall, David Betts and Robin Wells relaxing at our
10th Anniversary party in Gloucester

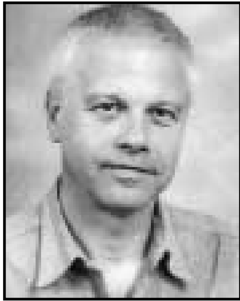
Ursula with the leader of the Philharmonia Orchestra

Pictures taken by:
Cynthia Cooper and Micheal Kulas

What RVW means to me:

By William Hedley

To mark our Tenth Anniversary we invited members to write short testimonials on 'What RVW means to me'. Here is a selection of responses:



William Hedley

William Hedley, Regional Chairman for France and the new Editor of the Journal, explains that RVW helps him understand his place in the world.

If the essay title is *The Fascination of Speed*, my English teacher once said, make sure you write about "fascination" rather than "speed". In other words, stick to the brief. I'm mindful of this advice now, concerned that sticking to the present brief requires me to write as much about myself as about Vaughan Williams.

I was first introduced to Vaughan Williams by Sir John Barbirolli. If only it was true, but I mean, of course, via his wonderful EMI LP of English string music. I wasn't totally swept away by the *Tallis Fantasia* at that time, nor by *Greensleeves*, preferring by a fair margin Elgar's two string masterpieces on the same record. Sir Adrian Boult's Ace of Clubs LP of the *London Symphony* was what really woke me up, and later markers were Bryden Thompson's reading of the *Fifth Symphony* and Matthew Best's inspirational performance of *Flos Campi*.

As a young teacher I had the pleasure of conducting a little Vaughan Williams, in particular *Valiant for Truth*, with a choir of young people. It went very well and we all enjoyed ourselves enormously, but I can see now that I had no idea of what the piece was about at all. I sang in choirs for many years but strangely never took part in a Vaughan Williams work. I've done what I could, though, with the amateur choirs I now conduct in Southwest France. They love singing *O Taste and See* – how could they not? – but more surprisingly they were very moved by *Lord, thou has been our refuge* as, equally surprisingly, were many of those who came to listen to it.

To return to the brief I have to evoke another musical memory, as a fledgling bass in the school choir, singing not Vaughan Williams, but Holst, his setting of Psalm 148. The tune he uses is *Easter Alleluia* from the *Cölner Gesangbuch* of 1623, sung in my parish church in those days to the words *All creatures of our God and King*. Each verse features a series of alleluias set to four notes descending by step, a simple yet affecting musical gesture which, combined with Holst's harmonies, had a powerful effect on this emerging musician. Vaughan Williams obviously valued this tune highly as he assigned at least two sets of words to it, and we find this inconsequential four-note phrase throughout his works. It is frequently used at moments of the utmost emotional importance, as at the words "Except our love" in Act 2 of *Hugh the Drover*. Listen out for it, too, in *Flos Campi*, especially in the closing passage headed *Set me as a seal upon thine heart*. *The Fifth Symphony* contains countless examples of it, and it's particularly moving to hear how, within just a few bars of the opening of the finale, Vaughan Williams can't leave it alone, bringing it in as part of the counter-melody to the passacaglia theme. The final pages are totally made up of the phrase or very close variations on it. And of course *Sine Nomine* ends with these four notes.

Vaughan Williams repeatedly tried to debunk the idea that there was any point in looking for meaning in his music. The only important thing, he said, was that it should be beautiful, and much of his music may be listened to with nothing more in mind than that. Yet more than any other composer, my own reaction to the music of Vaughan Williams, as well as rejoicing in the sheer beauty of it, is to search for clues as to what was happening in the composer's head. He is, I think, among the most enigmatic of composers. Why was he so obsessed – not too strong a word, I suggest – by these four descending notes? With what, or whom, did he associate them? "Four movements, all of them slow" he said about the *Pastoral Symphony*, yet the third movement ends with a coda as light and airy as Mendelssohn's fairy music. It is quite convincing and moving, but what on earth is it doing there? The composer constantly explores those thoughts and issues we tend to avoid because they are painful, ambiguous or difficult to apprehend. Mysteries abound, in *Flos Campi*, *The Lark Ascending*, the *Sixth Symphony*, the *Ninth*, even the Harmonica *Romance*. There are many other examples, voyages into the human soul, reaching corners we may not want to explore, or not know how to, the paradoxes in life and death, love and eternity. We might argue that all great art is a quest of this nature, but what sets Vaughan Williams apart is his extraordinarily personal manner. The listener may eavesdrop and even participate.

The brief was to write about what Vaughan Williams means to me. Reluctantly, then, for fear of revealing too much as well as a laudable unwillingness to mention myself even in the same sentence as the great subject of this Journal, I would say that by his ability to compose music at once unmistakably personal and universal, and through his celebration of all that is beautiful and admirable in humankind whilst at the same time exploring our darkest and most mysterious impulses, Vaughan Williams helps me in the near-impossible task of understanding myself and finding my place in the world.

William Hedley

SEUMAS SIMPSON

Seumas Simpson, our Regional Chairman for Scotland, sees RVW as a great composer – and a great human being.

Just before the beginning of the Second World War, when I was about seven years old, I wrote my *Fantasia* on '*Greensleeves*'. (This article has a regrettable but inevitable autobiographical element.) It consisted of little more than the tune which, since I had not yet learned about 6/8 time, I had notated in 2/4; in consequence, the piece was somewhat less accomplished than its more famous namesake. (And as a harbinger of things to come was certainly no *Robin's Nest*.) However, this daft reminiscence shows that the pre-war BBC had brought the name of Ralph Vaughan Williams and the sound of one of his most popular compositions to a child in a small Scottish town. Since that time, the music of that towering composer, as Hans Keller described him, has been one of my most enriching mental possessions and my life has been illuminated by a succession of discoveries of it.

In those far-off days the BBC was concerned to educate its listeners, that is, to help them enjoy the good things in life, and in the succeeding wartime and immediately post-war years my horizons were extended by such things as the Forces' Educational Broadcasts, including programmes on music by Roger Fiske, and *Music Magazine*, edited by Anna Instone and Julian Herbage. One unforgettable edition of this latter brought news of a new symphony, his *Sixth*, by RVW with illustrations played by its dedicatee, Michael Mullinar. As soon as they appeared, I got hold of the score and the first recording and got to know the work. A live performance in Dundee, by the then Scottish Orchestra under its conductor Walter Susskind, was a supremely exciting experience: the energy, the menace, the eerie stillness dispelled any impression on the part of the audience that VW was simply a painter of pastoral scenes.

Other milestones followed. In my first year at St Andrews University I had the privilege and utter joy of singing in VW's *Mass* and in *In Windsor Forest* under the baton of the composer Cedric Thorpe Davie, a pupil of VW, Kilpinen and Kódaly, and an outstanding trainer and conductor of

amateur choirs. Succeeding years at St Andrews brought participation in other works by VW, including the *Serenade to Music*; I even played the orchestral piano part in *The Running Set*.

In 1957, while awaiting National Service posting overseas, I attended a concert at which Kathleen Long gave the first performance of Gerald Finzi's *Eclogue* for piano and strings. As I came away from the concert, I was stopped in my tracks by my first and only sight of VW himself, also leaving the hall. (I'm afraid that my thoughts were exactly those of the lady who had previously seen only photographs of King George VI before setting eyes on him at some event. 'Isn't it like him!' she exclaimed.) At that time I was stationed at Maresfield Camp in Sussex. Only some forty years later did I learn with a shiver of excitement that VW himself had spent time in that selfsame camp during the First World War, a bizarre connection between myself and the great man.

Later years brought membership of university choirs in Edinburgh and Glasgow and more singing of music by VW. An unforgettable surprise was *Dona Nobis Pacem* performed by Glasgow University Orchestra and Choral Society conducted by Frederick Rimmer. I knew nothing about the work and, judging by the title, assumed that we were going to take part in some quiet anthem. I was totally unprepared for the vast orchestra that appeared at rehearsals and for the anguish and ferocity of portions of the music. Walt Whitman's words seemed to me to encapsulate a crucial aspect of VW's extra-musical thinking and the setting of 'Reconciliation' is one of the most unbearably moving pieces of music that I know. Although I was a schoolboy during the Second World War, the First, 'the war to end all wars', was a constant presence to me from hearing anecdotes by ex-service friends of my parents: one such was an account by a man pinned down in a trench by a dead man and almost drowning in his blood. VW must have witnessed scenes like these and his abhorrence of war almost catches one by the throat in this work. (The *Pastoral Symphony*, of course, sees Flanders Field reappearing in a different aspect.)

As time has gone by, I have come to know more about the huge range of VW's music, its variety and the unexpected forms and instrumentation that its composer explored. This is possible only because of the availability of CDs. I am unlikely ever to encounter a live performance of *Flos Campi*, for example, but I possess four recordings of it. I can listen to any of the five operas whenever I want but have only seen one production, namely of *Riders to the Sea*. My treasury of recordings of VW's music is a priceless source of delight. It is extraordinarily gratifying to see the burgeoning of writing about technical aspects of VW's music that has taken place in the last couple of decades, by Wilfrid Mellers, Lewis Foreman, Alain Frogley and many others. I am indebted to them for deeper understanding of the mechanics of the music.

I believe that VW was not only one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century but the greatest composer that the British Isles have ever produced. Yet he was more than that. He was, in the literal sense of that dreadfully hackneyed phrase, a great human being. The works of James Day, Michael Kennedy, Roy Douglas, Simona Pakenham, and above all Ursula Vaughan Williams have given us a picture of a man of impeccable honour, friendship, generosity, humour, commitment. His selfless efforts on the part of others, in all sorts of ways throughout his life, were outstanding. His personal valour and dedication in both World Wars are exemplary. At his age he did not need to volunteer in the First and, presumably, there was no need for him to remain in the United Kingdom during the Second, far less dedicate himself in all manner of ways, as he did, to helping in the war effort. His faithfulness to the idea of journeying, exploration and discovery, from *Toward the Unknown Region* through *The Pilgrim's Progress* to the *Sinfonia Antartica*, seems to have been something that remained with him throughout all his life. Even what failings he seems to have had, if failings they be, appear endearing: his short-lived explosions of temper during rehearsals, his ideas about interpretation (some of them 'ridiculous', according to Adrian Boult), his mischievousness (apparently pulling Ernest Newman's leg in print about the Reconciliation motif in *Götterdämmerung*). These accounts of his life are a fitting adjunct to VW's supreme memorial, the music itself.

J.M.Y. Simpson

DAVID BETTS

David Betts

David Betts, our Membership Secretary, remembers singing in *A Sea Symphony* with RVW in the audience.

I don't remember seriously listening to music at all before the age of 11, by which time my family consisted of a mother, a stepfather, and a baby brother, and we had just moved from Southend to Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight. I had spent two terms at Southend High School for Boys where I had attended some music lessons and sung alto in the Alleluia Chorus. I seem to remember that the school had suggested that I might like to learn to play the trombone in the school orchestra if my parents could afford to buy the instrument for me. They couldn't, so that was the end of that – I sometimes wonder if being an orchestral player would have suited me rather well as an alternative career. Anyway, arriving in Bonchurch in 1948 I was immediately drafted into the village church choir by the local rector and since that time there has been only one year, much later in Columbus, Ohio, in the USA, in which I did no singing at all. I thrived in the Bonchurch church choir, eventually becoming head boy and bell-ringer, with some invaluable experience as a sight reader of hymns and anthems. There was also a mixed choir at my school, Sandown Grammar School, but boys there – or at any rate most of my circle – felt that it was too much of a girl thing, and I remember only one occasion when I found myself in a small group for a school concert. But I digress.

I have no doubt that I must have sung RVW hymns in Bonchurch, but my first clear memory of admiring a piece of RVW was at school when a visiting singer performed '*The Vagabond*' from *Songs of Travel* to an assembled group in the school hall. At home I did start listening to occasional concerts on the radio but it was a rather clandestine affair because it bothered the others and had to be so low in volume that my ear had to be almost touching the radio speaker. I really cannot remember how I knew what to tune in to, or how I decided what was worth listening to. But I do clearly remember knowing that a new symphony by RVW was to be broadcast by the BBC and I made a point of listening to it, and was mightily impressed. It was the *Sinfonia Antartica* so it must have been in January 1953 when I was in the lower sixth form working at Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry A-levels.

But I think that RVW cannot yet have featured strongly in my mind, although music generally was becoming important. I was very grateful to be given a truly awful piano and for a few years my father, whom I still saw from time to time, paid for piano lessons up to about grade 5 when I was kicked out because bills were not being paid. I remember a class debate at school on the subject of the greatest living composer and the winner was Sibelius. In that year, (1953) I won the Lower Sixth form prize and I chose 'Sibelius' by Cecil Gray. In 1955, just before I went to Wadham College, Oxford, with a college scholarship to study Physics, my choice of school Prize was 'Kathleen Ferrier – a Memoir', edited by Neville Cardus. Physics and Music, in that order, have continued to dominate my work and leisure.

On arrival in Oxford I promptly joined the college chapel choir but, much more importantly, I became a tenor in the Oxford Bach Choir then under the baton of Sidney Watson who had recently taken over from Sir Thomas Armstrong. I remained with it for nine years. That choir had a long experience of Vaughan Williams works and I was fortunate to have taken part in a performance of *a Sea Symphony* with RVW and Herbert Howells in the audience. That must, I think, have been just before Christmas 1957 when RVW was nearing the end of his life. I have never forgotten that and indeed I have sung it with equal pleasure on many subsequent occasions with several different choirs. The Oxford Bach Choir introduced me to many other RVW choral works too including the *Mass in G Minor*, *Sancta Civitas*, *Hodie*, *Five Tudor Portraits*, *Five Mystical Songs*, *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Currently, and from its formation in 1968, I have been singing as a first tenor with the Brighton Festival Chorus (BFC) and as of this year the Brighton Early Music Festival Singers (BREMF). I also have experience of singing with several London choruses, including the London Pro Musica Chorus through the 1980s and otherwise as an occasional extra with the

Philharmonia Chorus and the English Baroque. I cannot honestly say that these later experiences have provided more than a few highlights of RVW items although there have been some, including the BFC's performance, with the London Choral Society, of the *Sea Symphony* at a Prom in 1992.

So, RVW's vocal music has been the primary spur driving me to familiarise myself with the whole range of his work by concert-going and, more systematically, by building up a collection of recorded music. But as well as RVW, CDs since the early eighties have also steered me into whole areas of music that I scarcely knew about before, much of it 20th century English. The RVW Society, of which I am a founder member, is the only composer Society I belong to, partly because I recognise the possibility that without it RVW's importance might have been increasingly overlooked in the decades after his death. I am also fond of, to give just a very few examples, Monteverdi, Berlioz, Nielsen, Elgar, Shostakovich, Mahler, *etc., etc*. and of course the essential three Bs and some other German and Austrian baroque and romantic composers. But these figures have made it into the consciousness of concert programmers, while a glance at the 2004 Proms programme shows that RVW still needs a push.

David Betts

EM MARSHALL

Trustee Em Marshall finds in RVW the Englishness that defines who and what she is.

Em Marshall

Vaughan Williams's music has been deeply ingrained in my soul. Some of my earliest memories are of my father singing *Linden Lea* to me. I remember even a child being moved to tears by this hauntingly beautiful song, which has stayed with me as a favourite ever since. It is to this - the early sowing of seeds in the form of *Linden Lea* - that I now attribute my all-consuming love of English music. Whilst otherwise raised primarily on Bach, Schubert and Purcell, Holst was my first major discovery at the age of 7 or so (*St. Paul's Suite* and *Planets*), and when I went to St Paul's Girls' School a few years later this wonderful new sound-world of English music opened up for me to explore. Holst's part songs! Vaughan Williams's *Mass in G minor* and *Five Mystical Songs*! And Howells's piano pieces, as I bunked off lessons to flee to my sanctuary of a practice room and play to my heart's content. I suppose it was the charismatic Director of Music, Hilary Davan Wetton, who (unwittingly) facilitated my passion for English music, as I went around spending my every penny on his recordings of Holst, Vaughan Williams, Elgar and so on. The impact Holst in particular made on me was deeply profound, and I began avidly listening to anything by these early twentieth century British composers that I could find. Thus, pursuing the classified pages of a BBC music magazine one day I noticed an advert for people to help set up and join a Vaughan Williams Society. I was 15, and replied eagerly to the advertisement, subsequently turning up to one of the first meetings to establish the society. And strangely enough, as I, a painfully shy, naive, diminutive slip of a child marched into to a room full of scholarly elderly gentlemen (as they seemed to me then!), their jaws simultaneously hitting the floor in astonishment, I felt more perfectly at home than I had until then in my life. The next concert I attended was "with" the society - and it was there that Stephen introduced me to John Bishop (of Thames Publishing) who was to be my mentor and closest friend thenceforth until his death in 2000. He continued to reveal this magical world of English music to me, introducing me to more Vaughan Williams - *Riders to the Sea* (which we saw in Cambridge programmed with *Savitri*), *Dona Nobis Pacem*, and the symphonies – whilst also enabling me to become better acquainted with Britten, Delius, Elgar and the English song composers, taking me to concert after concert and inviting me to all his meetings with composer relatives and the authors of his books as I worked with him at Thames. He shared with me his indepth knowledge of the composers and the music, teaching me patiently, usually by offering a tantalising snip of music one evening and waiting for me to enquire further before relating composer biographies or a synopsis of their output. From poets set by the composers through to a complete history of music printing methods - I was, over the years, most gently but rigorously versed. And all this time I immersed myself deeply in the music of these composers by whom I had in my teens been fascinated, and then grew to love so deeply and know so intimately.

What does RVW mean to me? What is his appeal? There are a handful of composers I *have* to listen to every so often to stay sane (the bane of someone trying to do about 5 full-times jobs at once!) - Bach brings balm to my troubled heart and alone is capable of calming me in any situation, staggering me with the beauty and spirituality of his music; Wagner rouses me to heady heights; Mahler at once stirs me to extreme passion and pacifies me; Britten burns me with the agonising poignancy of his operas or charms me with the wit and sparkling brilliance of his songs; Quilter brings painful, tender, joy, at once bringing me back to earth and returning me to a blissful childhood; Holst never ceases to amaze me and, more than any other composer, communicates directly with my soul, calling to me, but Vaughan Williams is a homecoming - he is an old friend, whom it is a nostalgic joy and delight to visit every time. I feel comfortable and secure around him - I comprehend where he is coming from, I understand what he is saying and whole-heartedly concur with his sentiments. I admire the proficiency and skill of his writing, and am occasionally - for example, when listening again to one of his symphonies after a long time of not hearing them - astounded at his masterly adroitness. He warms me with his lyricism and romanticism, he moves me, he speaks in a language I also talk (*Oxford Elegy, Toward the Unknown Region*!) and he tells of places I know and poets I love. The reasons why RVW means so much to me are too many to number and too deeply-felt to express in mere mortal words. By a snatch of tune or brief phrase his music embodies on the one hand a so-succinct summing up of my childhood and, on the other, those wonderful years spent under John's musical guidance; in it come to life numerous poems that have pierced my heart life-long, through it bursts the wildness that cries out to my soul in pieces such as *Riders to the Sea*, and last, and possibly most importantly, shines the Englishness that is who, and what, I am.

Em Marshall

LINDA HAYWARD

Linda Hayward explains how RVW's music opens up those 'magic casements'.

I am afraid it is an addiction, once the RVW bug gets you nothing is ever the same again! When Vaughan Williams's music hit me between the eyes a voyage of discovery started that will take a life - time to enjoy. Like all enthusiasts, I wanted to know everything at once. I wanted to hear all the symphonies, wanted to know what else he had written, and wanted to know about him as a person. I read Ursula's biography *RVW* and got Michael Kennedy's book *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. It was obvious that Ralph Vaughan Williams was a prolific composer, and I had only scratched the surface by listening to the *Pastoral Symphony, Tuba Concerto* and *Lark Ascending*. As I explored further, I was amazed at the variety of his music. All the symphonies were completely different and yet were obviously written by the same composer.

As I discovered more of his music some pieces became firm favourites, others not, others are yet to be explored. My natural inclination is for orchestral music so I listened to that genre first, but as the *Sea Symphony* used voices this led me on to VW's choral works. A chance hearing of part of *Pilgrim's Progress* on the radio led me to rush out and buy the Adrian Boult edition. Investigation of RVW's other operas followed. Not only did I want to hear his music, I wanted to see it, so I started getting the scores. I read as many of Vaughan Williams's writings as possible, and was impressed at their clarity, wisdom and truth. The article about writing film music was very entertaining and, as I am a film addict as well, it opened up another area of music. The letters between Holst and RVW were also informative and entertaining. In my journey to learn about my favourite composer I have attended various lectures or summer schools, which have helped me know more of the music, the context in which it was created, and realise how prolific he was. I associate certain works with each venue. At Reigate in 1996, I heard the *Piano Concerto* for the first time, and *Sir John in Love* was a highlight of 1997. The special Charterhouse Symposium in 2000, was a wonderful experience, which led my explorations into new directions, mainly song cycles and chamber music.

How can one explain why a particular composer's music means more than another? Ralph Vaughan Williams's music strikes something in me that gives me pleasure and enjoyment and opens up those "magic casements" that RVW wrote about. Learning about his life and reading his written word has helped me understand and love the music more. His character is shown in his writing and music, but the music above all shows what a great composer he was.

Linda Hayward.

ERICA RUSSO

Erica Russo finds RVW's music guiding her at defining moments in her life.

We had buried my grandfather two days earlier. His death was not unexpected but the pain we all felt remained as sharp and crisp as if he had died in a sudden accident. Flying home on the Saturday red-eye, I found myself unable to cry, yet unable to think of anything else, and I dreaded the thought of getting up for church in the morning.

During the pre-service rehearsal, the intense concentration required to sight-read the anthems—since I had missed weekly rehearsal—distracted me somewhat, and I was quite glad that no one said much about my absence. Away from the funeral, I didn't have it in me to murmur polite thanks for expressions of condolence. I neglected to look ahead to the hymns listed in our service bulletin, thinking I would have no problem singing them, and just living to get through the service and return home once the morning had ended.

Imagine, then, dutifully and obliviously opening the *1982 Hymnal* for the Gradual, Hymn 487, and being confronted with the opening chords of "Come, my way, my truth, my light." For the first time in days, I lost control, first of my vocal cords, then of my tears. As the hymn washed over me, the kind chorister to my right simply squeezed my arm, handed me a tissue, and whispered gently, "It *will* be all right, dear."

Vaughan Williams's music has guided me so often during my adult life that choosing a most significant occasion is just too difficult. It has comforted me in times of great sorrow and has, in the case of *Sinfonia Antartica*, provided the soundtrack to a rare but fierce Maryland blizzard. When I auditioned for my current position with the Soldiers' Chorus of The United States Army Field Band, I took it as a great omen of good fortune that they sent "See the chariot at hand" from *Sir John in Love* to learn for the choral portion of the audition. *Ten Blake Songs* worked their way into my first solo chamber performance, and a photocopy of *A Hymn of Freedom* arrived in my mailbox shortly after the United States entered into war with the Taliban in 2001. Sometimes I feel an event to be lacking in significance if Vaughan Williams and his eloquent compositions play no part in my experience.

My husband often encourages me to use this emotional bond in developing a research project; a former musicologist, I know I have the skills to do so, but I don't know that I am ready to overscrutinize every note and overanalyze every chord change in a way that would cause most professional musicologists to take my work seriously. Instead, for the moment, I remain content to allow Vaughan Williams to take me by surprise, to greet me like an old friend, or to wait until I need him the most.

Erica Russo

HERMAN SIMISSEN

Herman Simissen hears in RVW's music a beacon of hope for us all.

Saturday the fourteenth of July, 1979, was a memorable day for me. Not because the French remembered the hundred and ninetieth anniversary of their Revolution, not even because I got my first pay in the job I had in a sports shop over the summer, but because on that day for the very first time I heard a composition by Ralph Vaughan Williams. I remember it really well: in St. Stephen's, the largest church of my hometown Nijmegen, the *Schola Cantorum* of Ampleforth Abbey gave a concert. On their programme was the *Mass in G minor*. According to the concert notes, Vaughan Williams was a very famous composer in his own country, but, alas, not particularly well known abroad. I, for one – then a twenty year old student of history – had never even heard of the composer.

But somehow Vaughan Williams's music must have struck with me immediately, because the next week I went to the local record shop – now that first pay came in quite handy! – and bought the only available record with music by Vaughan Williams. I still have this record: it is by the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, directed by Neville Marriner, performing the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, Fantasia on Greensleeves*, *The Lark Ascending* – with Iona Brown as a soloist – and *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'*. I at once simply loved the music, and from then on became a compulsive, if not addicted, collector. I started buying records and later, of course, compact discs with music by Vaughan Williams: symphonies, choral works, songs, whatever I could obtain in the Netherlands or during my annual holiday in England. And this opened up a new world for me: I also got to know and value the music of his contemporaries, like Gustav Holst, George Butterworth, Gerald Finzi or Herbert Howells, also composers of whom I had never heard before. (The only English composers I did know were Edward Elgar and Benjamin Britten.)

What was it that made me love the music by Vaughan Williams immediately when I got to know it? When I try to think about this question, I guess the answer is, apart from the fact that his music is often simply beautiful and a joy to listen to, in what I would like to call the 'progressive traditionalism' of his music: his ability to write highly original, melodious music that nevertheless reveals a deep knowledge and understanding of the tradition he forms part of. In this respect, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* for me is what all his music is about: an extraordinary creative re-interpretation of a theme from a distant past. In my view, his music confirmed, and still confirms, that a thorough knowledge of the past does not restrict one's creativity, but, indeed, might be a condition to move successfully forward toward the unknown region of the future. As such, I think the music by Ralph Vaughan Williams somehow can be a beacon of hope for every human: if one knows and understands one's past, there is no need to fear the future – all kinds of problems can be solved in a creative way. Just listen, and let his music be an inspiration!

Herman Simissen

JOHN BARR

John Barr acknowledges the contribution of Ursula Vaughan Williams.

RVW holds great significance for me because he was both a great composer and a great human being. His devotion to music extended to performers, professional and amateur alike as well as to listeners in any walk of life. In doing this his compositions fulfill the functions of various public and private events in our common society and express a wide range of human emotions from light-hearted feelings to the deepest contemplations concerned with ultimate reality. His prose writings are a delight to read, revealing a keen mind and a quick sense of humour expressed in a lively style.

Ursula Vaughan Williams has my continual gratitude for her own literary gifts and for her part in, and the extension of, her husband's music to succeeding generations. I am also grateful for our RVW Society that keeps RVW's legacy flourishing. May they "go from strength to strength." RVW's music and life have and will continue to enrich, delight and deepen my time on earth.

John Barr

Jonathan Pearson

JONATHAN PEARSON

Regional Chairman, Jonathan Pearson, discusses RVW from the hymn tunes – and recounts a wonderful path of discovery.

When Stephen Connock asked my colleagues and me to write something for the tenth anniversary Journal, we were given a very broad brief, but with the proviso that it should be something personal. My own solution was to recall what Vaughan Williams has meant to me over the last forty years, but by the time I got to my college days around 1972 it became clear that I would not reach the birth of the Society before the June 2010 issue. Even the digital cat on my word processor went to sleep. So, in the end, I decided to concentrate on those all-important formative years when the joys of experience and discovery are blessed with the untrammelled optimism of youth. As for a title, the two that came into my head, *My Early Life* and *A Musical Autobiography*, have apparently been used before.

It is not usually considered a 'good thing' to wallow in nostalgia, but I make no apology, on this occasion, for breaking the rule and I invite you now to put on your waders and wallow with me.

I first came across the name of R. Vaughan Williams at school in Bradford in the mid-1960s. In those days we had a formal assembly which included a hymn, and I began to note my favourite tunes in the *Public School Hymnbook*. My favourites included 'Who would True Valour See' (*Monks Gate*) and 'Ye Watchers and ye holy ones' (*Lasst uns erfreuen*). Only much later did I discover that these and many others had been harmonised by RVW. If I had troubled to read the Preface, where he is described as 'the greatest living authority on hymn tunes', I would have noted that he himself had revised the new post-war edition (originally edited by C. S. Lang) and, with characteristic self-effacement, had not credited his own arrangements.

However, his original tunes were acknowledged. Once a year, on Remembrance Day, while we sang all eight verses of *For all the saints*, a solemn and select procession of prefects and cadets marched out of the hall to the school war memorial and back, to lay a wreath. It was always touch and go whether they would reappear before the final alleluias died away. Bishop How's magnificent words ('The golden evening brightens in the west', 'Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host') and the glorious sweep and nobility of VW's *Sine Nomine* are a combination which must surely have secretly stirred many a 'well 'ard' teenage boy's heart.

At Christmas, when we sang from *Carols for Choirs*, I took special note of the music credits. Sure enough, there he was again ('We've been awhile awandering', 'O Little Town of Bethlehem', etc.), in among the Jacqueses and the Willcockses. Here I discovered gems like *The Blessed Son of God*, which made me yearn to hear the cantata *Hodie* (from which it comes), a wish not fulfilled until Willcocks's own recording came my way a few years later.

One Wednesday lunchtime, a friend introduced me to the school record library. Those usual suspects, Mozart and Beethoven, predominated, garnished with Shostakovich and Stravinsky. Of course, it would be wrong to deny that I failed to appreciate these distinguished gentlemen, although at the age of twelve my musical centre of gravity tended rather more to Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. However, on this particular Wednesday, my friend pulled out a record and handed it to me. 'Have you tried Vaughan Williams?' he casually remarked. 'Ah! The hymn-tune man,' I thought. 'So he had written other things, as well.' I took it home - *Serenade to Music* and *The Wasps* overture - and I played it over and over and over again.

For Simona Pakenham, as she recounts in her book, it happened when she turned on the radio while she was ironing, in 1942. For me, it was the chance remark of a friend. But from that moment my musical life changed for ever. Yes, I know it's a cliché, but it's true—it was a revelation. This music seemed to bypass conscious thought altogether; it left behind the easy synchromesh of mere 'musical appreciation' and engaged directly with the cogs of my spiritual soul. This music, so it seemed to me at this impressionable age, effortlessly, unconsciously matched the template of my musical and cultural identity. This must surely be what VW meant, when, on hearing *Bushes and Briars* for the first time, he felt he had always known it. Nearly forty years later, VW's now very familiar music still has the same effect. So I must here solemnly record a heartfelt debt of gratitude to my old school friend. Where are you now, Murdoch, S? (You should be a member!)

Singing in the school choir, taking piano lessons and going to subscription concerts in Huddersfield Town Hall sharpened my interest in music of all kinds. Concert reviews, programme notes and musical reference books commanded my attention. But I was alarmed to find that most critics seemed to agree that really good music had to be a) German, b) if not German, foreign, or c) cacophonous. If it was all three, then it was the great music of our time. These same critics took it as read that English music, unless, curiously, it was a) foreign, like Handel, or b) Britten, or c), cacophonous could never be compared favourably to 'proper' music like Beethoven, Stravinsky, Mozart, Schoenberg or Schubert. I also found it strange that it was apparently of great interest and highly commendable if a *foreign* composer such as Bartók or Grieg, took a scholarly interest in his country's indigenous music, or allowed folk song to influence his work, but if an English composer did it, he was insular, parochial and hopelessly old-fashioned. I therefore felt decidedly uncomfortable and slightly embarrassed in company because I really liked the English pieces I heard.

I found a copy of Frank Howes's 1954 book, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*. My appetite whetted, I returned to the school record library, then the municipal record library then the local music shop. There was *Greensleeves*, and *Tallis*, and one or two symphonies, but where were the recordings of the big choral works and the operas? It was exasperating to read about pieces I could never get to hear for myself. Well, this was the mid 60s and VW was decidedly out of fashion. Or was he?

Of course, Boult had recorded all the symphonies in the 1950s, but, highly acclaimed as they were (and deservedly so), most were in mono (boringly old-fashioned for schoolboys eager to put the new family stereo through its paces) and, in any case, few of them came my way. Just as I was about to despair of ever being able to do more than read about *Sancta Civitas* or *Hodie*, a trickle of new LPs began to appear, thanks to those stalwarts, Sir Adrian Boult and David Willcocks, and also, a comparative newcomer to the English musical scene, an American jazz pianist and film composer called André Previn. Intrigued by his hair, I bought Previn's recording of the *Seventh Symphony*, the one where Sir Ralph Richardson reads the superscriptions aloud in a croaking voice redolent of certain powders more usually associated with the family of another illustrious conductor.

But Previn's *Antartica* was just the tip of the iceberg. In the same year, Boult's recording of the *Sixth Symphony* appeared and during the next five years, both conductors recorded the complete cycle. This was riches indeed, although I couldn't afford to buy all of them.

I must mention here the late and very lamented Hugh Bean, soloist in *The Lark Ascending*, which was included as a fill-up to *the Sixth Symphony*. Those of us lucky enough to have heard him speak a couple of years ago, in one of the most entertaining talks we have had at our AGMs, will have been as surprised as I was to hear him describe, with typical modesty, how he didn't even know the piece and had little more than a morning to prepare for the recording. Many, however, will agree with me that that recording has yet to be surpassed.

And this was not all. A positive flood of recordings was about to come from the baton of David Willcocks, then Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge and conductor, like VW before him, of the Bach Choir in London. *Hodie* came out in 1965. Then, in 1968, he recorded no fewer than seven major works, all of them gems. It was with these that I was introduced to wonderful singers like John Shirley Quirk and Ian Partridge in *Sancta Civitas*, Heather Harper in *Benedicite*, John Shirley Quirk again in that wonderfully atmospheric recording of *Five Mystical Songs*. Then there was the *Mass in G minor*, with its subtle blend of old and new, a work that astonished me when I first heard it, *Flos Campi* (another extraordinary piece), *Five Variants of Dives* and *Lazarus and An Oxford Elegy*. This last sent me scurrying to find a copy of Matthew Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*. I loved the rhetorical and evocative

language (‘Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm, / Up past the wood, to where the elm-tree crowns / The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?’) and it was illuminating to see how VW adapted the two poems to his purpose. It was also the first time I had heard the spoken word set to music in this way and I soon found myself declaiming the poem aloud, in imitation of the rich tones of John Westbrook, until I knew it by heart.

The last jewel of Willcocks’s 1960s recordings is *Five Tudor Portraits*, with Elizabeth Bainbridge, John Carol Case, the Bach Choir and the NPO. Just now listening again to ‘Jane Scroop’s Lament for Philip Sparrow’, I am impressed by the way Vaughan Williams treats the text with total dignity and integrity. There is nothing tongue-in-cheek in the references to the ‘Dies Irae’ or in the animated flourishes, there is no false sentimentality about this music, just a direct emotional response to Skelton’s simple, (perhaps to us) naïve, words which touches the heart. Here is some of VW’s most beautiful music and finest Ravelian orchestration. Listen to Jane’s reminiscences of her pet bird’s life, beginning ‘It had a velvet cap . . .’, and the extraordinary set piece where Jane summons all manner of birds: ‘To weep with me, look that ye come, All manner of birdés in your kind; See none be left behind.’ Vaughan Williams compels our interest in Skelton’s catalogue of birds with the most inventive and colourful music, culminating in the bird of Araby’s entreaty to the Almighty, ‘Libera me, Domine!’ At the end, there is Jane’s touchingly simple ‘Farewell! Philip adieu! Farewell without restore,’ and, as the harmony gently shifts beneath the B natural of the soloist’s closing bars, the final ‘Farewell for evermore.’ Having, myself, just lost a dearly-loved pet, ‘I wept and I wailed, the tears down-hailed.’ Although, ironically, mine was a cat.

I also heard *Job* for the first time, on the radio, and it bowled me over. Soon, I was hit in the musical solar plexus again, when by chance I was given a spare ticket to hear the *Fifth Symphony* at a live concert in Bradford. I had never heard it before and the effect it had on me must be something akin to the intense excitement Herbert Howells and Ivor Gurney experienced, after the first performance of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in Gloucester in 1910. However, I declined to wander the streets of Bradford all night and went home ecstatic but contented.

Having sung in the Huddersfield Choral Society during my last year at school (I fumbled my way through *The Watermill* for my audition), I arrived at Durham University in the Autumn of 1971. Imagine my surprise when I found out my room-mate was a godson of Hugh Bean.

The next year was the centenary of Vaughan Williams’s birth. I met my future wife and subjected her to all the VW recordings in my possession. This wasn’t as onerous as it sounds as she already knew *Linden Lea* and *Antartica*. Soon, we were both singing in the *Sea Symphony* with the university choral society. We all got a bit tangled in the hawsers, but with the help of the conductor, who at rehearsals would shout with disarming unpolitical correctness, ‘Bosoms ahoy!’ at appropriate moments, we made a creditable effort.

In the long vacation, I worked near Sloane Square at a summer school of questionable academic merit, teaching English to foreign teenagers in the mornings and taking them on trips in the afternoons. In the evenings, when I wasn’t otherwise engaged trying to prevent the boys from putting cornflakes in each other’s beds, for example (and then adding milk and sugar), I escaped to a deserted classroom with a transistor radio to listen to the Proms. It was while I was at this establishment that I spent some of my hard-earned cash on Boult’s new recording of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, featuring VW’s favourite Pilgrim, John Noble, from Boris Ord’s Cambridge production of 1954. I remember trying to play snatches of it on a record player more usually dedicated to blaring out disco music, to the background accompaniment of ping-pong and table football.

This was hardly ideal, but how I revelled in that music, so long anticipated. How fascinating to hear the themes VW incorporated into the *Fifth Symphony* when he had despaired of ever seeing his opera completed—the opening of the symphony’s Romanza and the passacaglia theme, for example, both to be heard, transformed, in the House Beautiful scene. There is so much of the essential Vaughan Williams in this work, which incorporates and distils the musical obsession of a lifetime: in Act Two, the stirring ‘Armour of Light’ chorus and an original tune for ‘Who would true valour see’, quite different from *Monks Gate*, which VW had arranged in 1906 for the *English Hymnal* from the folksong ‘Our Captain calls’; and, closing Act Three, the ‘Pilgrim in Prison’ interlude, with that wonderful passage where he discovers and uses the Key of Promise; then, as Act Four opens, the luminous ‘Song of the Woodcutter’s Boy’, beginning with a variant of the opening phrase of *Sine Nomine* (a phrase soon to be heard again in the Coronation motet, *O Taste and See*), and leading into a beautiful entr’acte which culminates in the exquisite *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*.

Years later, the BBC re-recorded the radio production of 1943, once more with Sir John Gielgud as Pilgrim, reprising his original role. This version has its own delights, not least the extended and variant passages from the *Tallis Fantasia*. It also contains episodes which are not in the opera. Fortunately, Hyperion have produced their own commercial recording of all the numbers containing music, again with (a by now slightly frail-sounding) Gielgud. They have also given us the original 1922 ‘Pastoral Episode’ of *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, so we can now hear the suitably less-extended ending of the shorter work.

But I must stop before the billows go over my head. I must resist the temptation to recount the highs and lows of the intervening years—Channel Four’s broadcast of *The England of Elizabeth* and most of the other short films for which VW wrote music, the disappointing Ken Russell South Bank Show, or the time, long before the advent of the domestic VCR, when I reprehensively sent my wife and fractious baby son out for a long walk with the pram, so I could record the sound track of the film *The Loves of Joanna Godden* with a microphone dangling in front of the television. But I *will* mention the extraordinarily moving experience I had last year, when I was asked by the Harpenden Choral Society to write a programme note for their performance of *Dona Nobis Pacem*, a concert which took place, as chance would have it, when the question of peace or war was still apparently hanging in the balance, the very week before the invasion of Iraq began. . .

As regards my formative years, however, well, they were drawing to a close, and the serious business of the rest-of-my-life was about to begin. ‘Needs must I, with heavy heart / Into the world and wave of men depart.’ But I always dreamed that a time would come when I would meet others who, like me, were waiting for the ‘spark from Heaven to fall.’ Then one day, I saw an advertisement, in which Robin Barber appealed for help in the setting up of a certain musical society. It so happened that Stephen Connock and John Bishop were also thinking along the same lines. Joining forces and calling a meeting in a small Swedish institute in London’s West End, early in 1994, the Swedenborg Three, as they were now affectionately known, together with a handful of dedicated supporters, among whom I am proud to have been one, were ready to proclaim the RVW Society to the world. Let us hope it may ‘roam on’ for many more years to come!

Jonathan Pearson,
Regional Chairman, South-East England

JILLIAN BARNES

Jillian Barnes remembers Epsom County Secondary Girls’ School: Spring Term 1958 and performing *St Matthew Passion* with RVW himself.

“Now girls”, said Miss Keble, the music teacher, addressing the school choir, “I want you to listen carefully as I have an important and exciting announcement to make. Along with several other schools we have been invited to send some girls to sing in a performance of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* at the Leith Hill Music Festival in Dorking on 5th March. Dr. Ralph Vaughan Williams – I’m sure you will have heard of him ...” - there was a buzz of assent - “... will be conducting the work, and the young people involved will be singing the ripieno part. This means you will be joining the Festival Choir in some of the chorales and singing in the chorus at the end of Part I and in the big opening and closing double choruses.”

She went on to explain that the girls taking part would travel to Dorking, attend the rehearsal, have tea in the Cottage Restaurant and then return to Dorking Halls for the performance. As this was such a special occasion

and no more than six girls could go, there would have to be auditions for those who wished to participate. It was essential that they could sing well, learn the music thoroughly and come to all the rehearsals after school.

So it was that an assorted collection of girls presented itself for audition, some of them probably attracted by the prospect of an unsupervised trip on the train to Dorking and tea at the Cottage Restaurant as much as anything else, for few of us had had experience of an orchestra outside the confines of a wireless or parents' old 78s, and none of us could envisage a "double chorus", whatever that might be.

The six singers were selected. We rehearsed the chorales, we learnt the ripieno line in the opening chorus, we wept over the opening bars of *In Tears of Grief*, for surely there had never been a more beautiful or heart-breaking piece of music written in the whole wide world. And on the day we joined all the other forces for the rehearsal (nudges and whispered exclamations, "Look, there's the conductor – isn't he *wonderful*?" and "Oh, and that must be Mrs. Vaughan Williams looking after him").

The 60 or so in the ripieno choir sat on chairs ranged at right angles on the floor of the hall immediately below the platform, and we looked up at the great man with . . . what? . . . Awe? Not really, for I think we sensed his humanity and unstuffiness, and his gesture as he turned to bend slightly towards us, look at us and bring us in for our first big entry in the opening chorus involved us in his commitment to the work so completely that we became one with him. We felt, too, such a part of the whole, with the soloists – Eric Greene, Gordon Clinton, Pauline Brockless, Nancy Evans, Wilfred Brown and John Carol Case - immediately above us.

And then the performance. Our ripieno part score had given us no indication of what to expect. Even if it had, nothing could have prepared us for the experience of hearing the *St. Matthew Passion* for the first time: actually seeing and singing with a huge choir and orchestra, and listening to Dr. Vaughan Williams's dramatic interpretation; this was something which changed instantly and utterly this fourteen-year-old's perception of life, past, present, future.

Less than six months later Dr. Vaughan Williams died. The BBC later broadcast his last *St. Matthew* – "my" *St Matthew*, now miraculously issued on CD [Pearl GEMS 0079. I saved all my pocket money to buy the vocal score and searched in vain for a recording which matched RVW's in dramatic intensity, then turned to his own music, going in at the deep end with *A Sea Symphony*.

Life without Vaughan Williams's music is inconceivable, and that first and last experience of his *St. Matthew* truly unforgettable.

And tea at the Cottage Restaurant was splendid too.

Jillian Barnes

Martin Murray

MARTIN MURRAY

Trustee Martin Murray nominates his top 10 Desert Island RVW discs.

I became aware of VW's music when I was a keen, rather than talented, 15 year-old oboist and first heard his *Oboe Concerto*. This was followed soon after by a chance encounter with the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. From then on I was hooked and was lucky enough to be discovering VW at a time (the early 1970s) when a lot of his then less familiar works were being released in modern recordings for the first time. EMI earned my eternal gratitude for its recordings of the *Mass in G minor, Sancta Civitas, Riders to the Sea, Hodie, Magnificat, An Oxford Elegy* and *Five Tudor Portraits*, as well as much of the chamber music. The days when I first played and replayed these recordings still remain vivid in my memory.

To my mind, the VW symphonies stand comparison with any other series of symphonies written during the twentieth century. In terms of the sheer breadth of human experience and variety of feeling encompassed in them, they affect me more than any other that I know, even after innumerable times of hearing them.

But rather than carry on in this vein and since I am never likely to be invited on to the airwaves, I have decided that the tenth anniversary of the Society is a suitable occasion to nominate my Top 10 Desert Island VW discs. These are (in no particular order):

- *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in the Barbirolli version, with the Sinfonia of London and the Allegri Quartet (EMI - CDM5672402).
- *Pastoral Symphony* – my favourite of the symphonies, despite its being heart-breakingly sad, and I like the Previn version best (RCA Red Seal 74321886802).
- *On Wenlock Edge* – the Ian Partridge performance with the Music Group of London remains the one for me (EMI – CDM5655892).
- *Oboe Concerto* – played by Robin Canter and the LSO under James Judd on IMP Masters (3036600212), a record that also includes a lovely recording of the *Six Studies in English Folksong*.
- *A London Symphony* (original 1913 version) – what a debt we owe to Ursula Vaughan Williams for allowing Richard Hickox to bring the original, much longer, version of this wonderful piece back from oblivion in his tremendous account with the London Symphony Orchestra (Chan 9902).
- *Sancta Civitas* – the Willcocks version (EMI – CDM5672212, which also includes John Westbrook's incomparable reading of *An Oxford Elegy*). I would like the section of Sancta Civitas beginning "And I saw a new heaven…" played at my funeral, please.
- *Five Mystical Songs* – preferably as sung by John Shirley-Quirk (EMI – CDM5655882).
- *Symphony No. 5* – a key reason for devotion to VW. There are several very good performances on record, but I would take the Vernon Handley version with the RLPO (EMI CDEMX9512) to my desert island.
- *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* – sheer magic, especially as played by the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields under Neville Marriner (Decca 4145952).
- *Job* – the Naxos recording with David Lloyd-Jones conducting the English Northern Philharmonia (Naxos 8553955) brings out the drama of this beautiful score particularly well, although Boult and Handley would also be close contenders.

Perhaps other members of the Society would like to submit their own lists of favourites.

In conclusion here's to the Society for all that it has done to promote and increase awareness of RVW's music over the past ten years. May it long continue to prosper.

Martin Murray

PETER FIELD

Peter Field, who shares his birthday with RVW, attended the first performance of the *Ninth Symphony*.

I was born on RVW's sixtieth birthday, although I did not become aware of this until some time after I had got to know his music. When I did find out that we shared the same birthday it seemed to really set the seal on the bond with him that I felt I had already developed. And this was before I purchased a copy of Ursula's biography, on publication in 1964. It was six years after his death and the wait for her book, and Michael Kennedy's "Works", seemed interminable at the time, so keen was I to

learn more about the man and his music. But it was wonderful when they at last arrived and I found out that there were indeed other things in his life that I shared. One of these was his early and abiding interest in architecture. Musically, I had learnt earlier of his admiration for Haydn, still my second 'favourite' composer.

I was introduced to classical music and Vaughan Williams at the same time, with *A London Symphony* being my entry point. This came about through a friend and his father who were both great RVW enthusiasts. The latter, who played the cello, once said to me that, unlike some other composers, Vaughan Williams always wrote interestingly for his instrument. I also remember him saying that a special liking for the *Pastoral Symphony* was the sign of a true devotee. I was hooked, and my exploration of the rest of his music began. With recordings then few and far between I was fortunate in hearing a number of works for the first time live. I suppose the concert I feel most privileged to have attended was the first performance of the *Ninth Symphony*. However, it was the *Fifth Symphony* that came to mean most to me, and this is the one that I always play on his/our birthday.

I have never ceased from the beginning to enthuse about Vaughan Williams to anyone I discover to be even remotely interested in music. One of my friends says that he never listens to him without thinking of me! Two others make a note of how long it takes for me to bring his name into the conversation each time we meet... He is indeed an essential part of my life. I shall remain eternally grateful to my friend and his father for opening up to me the world of music generally, and Vaughan Williams in particular; and to RVW himself for being the person he was and for creating such a large body of wonderful music which reaches deep into my soul.

Peter Field
Weybridge

ROBERT FIELD
Robert Field describes the Charterhouse performance of *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1972 as his greatest RVW musical experience.

When I was in my teens in the 1950s and my best musical experiences came from listening to the Top Ten from Radio Luxembourg, my elder brother Peter returned from Ireland with an interest in classical music and was especially under the spell of Vaughan Williams. The first records he bought were a pair of 78s of the *Tallis Fantasia* with *Greensleeves* as the fill-up and another of Suppé's *Poet* and *Peasant Overture*. It was this latter piece that caught me first and switched me from pop to classical music.

We soon upgraded the turntable on the Radiogram to one that played LPs and the first LP that Peter bought was the *London Symphony*. From then on we worked our way through the music of RVW then available, especially the first seven symphonies up to *Sinfonia Antartica* by Boult and the LPO and the *Eighth* on a Pye 10 inch by Barbirolli and the Hallé. I bought the Boult *Eighth* when it came out first in stereo when I was in Singapore doing my National Service and shortly after the *Ninth* when it appeared on the Everest label.

Some of the symphonies I found difficult to fully appreciate. I could never get on with the *Fourth* until hearing RVW conduct it himself. What an electrifying account that still is; especially since the current versions are in much better sound than when I first heard it on 78's acquired with a version of *Flos Campi* from a market stall in Singapore, rummaging amongst the records of such luminaries as Frankie Laine, Peggy Lee, Edmundo Ross and Victor Silvester in order to find all the records to complete the sets. The *Pastoral* remained an enigma to me for years, a fact I now find quite strange. At the time it seemed to be an odd evocation of the English countryside from a soldier abroad. Eventually it was Michael Kennedy who showed me that this is RVW's requiem and lament for the friends he lost in France and that it is the French countryside depicted in the music - a contrast to the horror surrounding him. It took a performance of *Sinfonia Antartica* at the Proms, with the whole arena shaking like an earthquake when the organ entered at the third movement, to bring this work truly alive for me.

Some of the other symphonies seemed as though one had always known them, especially the *Fifth*. I can still remember the effect of hearing this wonderful work for the first time on the Saturday evening after we had bought it. The bright green cover with the striking head of RVW on it (the series cover design) removed and the record taken from its polythene liner; then the glorious opening. I was hooked and have always loved this symphony above all the others apart from the *Sea Symphony*. Another notable buy was the 10 inch of *The Song of Thanksgiving* and the wonderful Jean Pougnet performance of *The Lark Ascending*. I don't think that this has ever been surpassed, although Peter tells me that the performance he heard with Campoli was the best ever.

Mention of the *Sea Symphony* brings to mind memorable local concerts heard at that time. Living in Hayes, Kent, it was off to Orpington for a performance of the opera *Sir John in Love*. Also, to Bromley Grammar School to hear the Bromley Symphony Orchestra perform *A Sea Symphony* with, wonder of wonders, Isobel Baillie and John Cameron, the singers on the original recording (another recording never equalled) under Sir Adrian Boult. The concert started with an additional item - *Valiant for Truth* - put in as a memorial to RVW who had recently died.

Lewisham Town Hall was the venue for yet another wonderful concert by the Orpington Singers and a Symphony Orchestra conducted by Audrey Langford: Constant Lambert's *Rio Grande* followed by Elgar's *Music Makers* and finishing with RVW's *Five Tudor Portraits*. There was never an opportunity to hear another concert like that until many years later when I was living in Surrey and attended the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra concerts conducted by Vernon Handley. And, fortunately, because of his expertise and dedication to British music there were many.

National Service broke in at this point and my musical horizons expanded in Singapore where many classical records could be purchased very cheaply. Barber, Nielsen, Prokofiev, Shostakovitch, Sibelius joined many others in my growing collection. New RVW records were, unfortunately, few and far between in those days and one could only dream of hearing works like *Sancta Civitas* some day. I never did track down an American record of a performance with organ.

Back in England in 1962 concert going began again, but all the great musical experiences I can remember from that time are not RVW ones. However, there is one outstanding exception. This was a performance of *Job* at Covent Garden with Sir Adrian Boult conducting. I knew the music well from his recording and loved the work of William Blake. So, seeing the combination of both in performance was an exciting experience. Another great RVW event of more recent times was the cycle of the nine symphonies given by Richard Hickox and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican.

And the greatest RVW musical experience in fifty years listening? Undoubtedly, it was the Centenary year production of *The Pilgrim's Progress* at Charterhouse School in Surrey. John Noble sang the part of Pilgrim and members of the Godalming Operatic Society were invited to join with the school in putting on this production, conducted by William Llewellyn, the then Head of Music at the school. This for me is the sum of all the marvellous works that came from the pen of this great man. In the final scene when Pilgrim reaches the end of his journey and the chorus and orchestra swell to the Alleluias above the 'York' tune - a light came on behind the stained glass window at the back of the stage area and Pilgrim appeared high up in front of it. A masterly stroke and one that still, thirty two years later, just writing about it and bringing it to mind, engenders an overwhelming emotional response in me.

Robert Field
Swanage

SIMON COOMBS
Our Vice Chairman, Simon Coombs, on the Society and his own path to discovering RVW's music.

On 26 July 1996, I went to Lord's to watch England playing Pakistan, as a guest of Eastern Electricity. In those days I was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the President of the Board of Trade, so I expected to be talking tariffs and take-overs. But no, within twenty minutes of sitting down, my host and I were deep in a discussion of English music in general and of RVW in particular, no surprise of course to anyone who knows that Stephen Connock, my host that day, was a senior director of Eastern Electricity!

Such was our rapport that day (on cricket as well as music) that another invitation soon followed, this time to St Giles Cripplegate in the Barbican for a lovely performance of RVW's early masterpiece *On Wenlock Edge*, albeit with some noises off! It was my first contact with genuine devotees of the music of Vaughan Williams – my own path had been through radio (*A Sea Symphony*), then LP (*Tallis*, *the 5th* and *6th symphonies*) and finally, gloriously, the explosion of music on CD (*Mystical Songs*, *Flos Campi* etc etc) – alas, live concert performances had been all too rare occurrences.

The huge gap in the life of the society left by the untimely death of Robin Ivison, a founder member, had to be filled somehow – but I recognized my inadequacy to replace a man who had seen RVW conduct the *Fifth Symphony* in 1950 (I was three years old) and who had been at the first performance of the *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1951. What an honour then to be asked to step into Robin's shoes.

I have watched with pleasure as the Society's membership has grown steadily towards the thousand mark. I have been thrilled by the success of Stephen Connock in enabling the recording of more and more of RVW's music, especially the operas. I was delighted to play a small part in setting up the exhibition at Down Ampney church – I hope that all readers of the journal will make the effort to visit this quiet corner of England, if indeed they have not already done so.

The Society arrives at its 10th anniversary in rude health, with buoyant membership, a widely respected and appreciated Journal and ambitious plans for the future – here's to the next decade of great music and good fellowship!

Simon Coombs

MICHAEL NELSON

Michael Nelson's devotion to RVW began 55 years ago in Leeds Town Hall…

If I were granted a variation to the famous eight desert island discs in favour of a desert island *composer* I would have no hesitation in choosing RVW - and if it were a question of choosing eight discs of his music I would find it easy, for example, to choose eight movements from the symphonies alone. Unfortunately that would leave out *Job* and *On Wenlock Edge* and the *Tallis Fantasia* and *Serenade to Music*, and . . . so a further variation would be called for. My devotion started some 55 years ago in Leeds Town Hall when, at a schools concert, the first symphony concert I had ever attended, I heard *The Wasps* Overture. Everything followed from that but I am still discovering new RVW works and re-discovering old ones. Why does his music mean so much to me that I sincerely believe my life has actually been the better for it ? For so many reasons. We are told that RVW was not a religious believer, at best an agnostic, yet for me some of his music has a spirituality that transcends any religious orthodoxy. Who can listen to the *Tallis Fantasia* in a cathedral, for example, and not feel that there is a Higher Presence? Let it be God if one is believer, some unexplained mystical force if one is not. Then again, I revere the breadth and depth of RVW's artistic vision. Is there any other 20th century composer who matches it? He takes us to the frozen polar wastes, to the peace of an English countryside that in this ravaged age we long for even more, to a quiet London square, to Satan's battle with God, to a bleak landscape that may or may not have been laid waste by war, to seascapes at once raging and calm. RVW's detractors point to all sorts of shortcomings in his music and they may be right for all I know but do we not have the precious gift to love someone despite, almost because of, their faults? It's all subjective anyway. What a *man* he was! A sturdy English oak whose roots went deep and whose branches reached thick and high. I beg the reader's pardon if that sounds like a cliche but it will surely do. And here's another: they don't make them like him anymore. He brings us sanity in an insane world.

Michael Nelson

JEFF ALDRIDGE

Jeff Aldridge remembers many concerts with RVW present and concludes that his nationality matters less and less.

"That's Vaughan Williams over there." The man pointed across the arena at the Albert Hall towards the seats nearest the orchestra (violin side). There sat the great man, looking pretty much as he does in Gerald Kelly's famous portrait, even down - in my memory - to wearing the same suit. It was 1953; I was fourteen years old and it was my first Prom. I was there with my friend Brian Jacobs, who had got me going on this classical music business in the first place, and we were standing in the second row of the prommers. The programme planners really gave you value for money in those days. This concert was given by the Hallé Orchestra and the great John Barbirolli - value enough in himself - but what a programme! Berlioz's *Roman Carnival Overture*, Debussy's *L'Apres-midi d'un Faune*, Grieg's *Piano Concerto*; then a novelty: the first performance of the *Symphony Number Three* by William Wordsworth - not the poet, of course, but his great great something something. The work was played, it was all right, it disappeared. I could remember nothing of it. Some forty years later I came across a CD of it in Edinburgh Central Library. I borrowed it and played it, hoping to revive a memory or two. I regret to say it did absolutely nothing; it was pleasant and instantly forgettable. Nevertheless, there it was and worth a performance, though it certainly lacked the substance of any of the three preceding pieces.

But that was all in the first half! Nowadays we are lucky to get all that in an entire concert. During the interval Brian and I were speculating about the music we were about to hear when the man in front turned round and pointed out the figure sitting in the stalls: "That's Vaughan Williams over there." VW was in fact talking with William Wordsworth and, no doubt, speaking encouragingly about the *3rd Symphony*; I am sure he found virtues that eluded me. But what was to come was by no means forgettable; indeed it remains the crucial part of one of the crucial days of my life.

The work that filled the second half of the programme was Vaughan Williams's still new symphony, the *Sinfonia Antartica*, receiving its prom debut. I had seen the Scott film, of course, and I knew a little of VW's music, but only a little (the *Greensleeves Fantasia*, *The Wasps Overture*). Barbirolli readied the orchestra and then began the symphony. Immediately I recognised the music - of course, it had featured in the film. But there was something else - something that the Wordsworth symphony lacked. It is difficult to define but it is a quality shared by all great music of any type, the quality of memorability and individuality. It is what distinguishes a great pop song from the run-of-the-mill songs churned out by the dozen; it is what lifts the Mozarts above the Salieris. We can go into abstruse arguments about technical skills and so on, and I would not wish to deny the importance of these. However, it would not be fair to deny Salieri his technical expertise, for instance; his problem is that we don't hear a piece of his 'cold' and say, "Ah yes, that's Salieri." The quality of memorability is crucial. As I say, it is pretty well impossible to define but it seems to me equally impossible to deny. We listen to works by - to take a random bunch - Handel, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Bartók and they immediately speak of the person who made them and, in many instances, lodge themselves somewhere inside the listener. That certainly happens to me and it certainly happened that day in the Albert Hall. It was a warm evening in July or August; there were a lot of people in the auditorium. Yet the music made its mark. That 'second subject' with its xylophone, piano and glockenspiel accompaniment to the slow tune in the strings

actually chilled me: I swear there was a physical reaction almost akin to a shiver. You will have gathered from this that I was totally involved in this music in a way that maybe only an adolescent can be, one who is making a new discovery in life. And so the symphony progressed. I can still see the lady trombonist in the 'penguin' sequence in the scherzo and another lady coping seemingly effortlessly with the hectic downward piano octaves in the same passage (I had not come across a piano as part of an orchestra before). As for the Albert Hall organ in full voice in the middle of the third movement, I have yet to hear a recording that comes near reproducing the sheer volume and magniloquence of that sound. Remember, I was standing in the second row of the prommers, so the first violins were no more than about ten feet from me. The organ gave forth with its mighty voice; the violins responded with a great sawing away with bows but to absolutely no effect: I could hear nothing of them. (I have to say that they are audible on record and it might be said that a slightly less formidable organ allows them to come through and thereby more truly reflect what the composer intended. I also have to say that I would give a lot to be able to hear the organ once more as I did that night.)

Anyway, the performance ended and RVW came on the platform to take his bow and I cheered and shouted and stamped along with everyone else. This large figure came on with his shuffling walk, twitching his eyebrows, shaking hands with Barbirolli, with Margaret Ritchie and others, bowing rather stiffly, and I realised that I was in the presence of an extraordinary person. It was not just that he had created this astonishing sequence of sounds that I had just heard; there was something about the man himself. This, like the quality of memorability in music, is difficult to define but just as much a reality. I have seen other men of genius (Britten, Tippett, Auden) whom I admire this side of odolatry but they did not possess this quality. Interestingly I caught a glimpse of it when I saw Aaron Copland (an urbane but pioneering figure, the New York left-winger who wrote of Puritan Appalachia and of events even further west) and Mstislav Rostropovitch (the last not a composer but a great interpreter and a man whose courage and integrity shines from him). Again, this might be a consequence of my age when I received this benediction but the impression was so much more intense on that summer night in the Albert Hall: no person other than Ralph Vaughan Williams has ever convinced me of his greatness simply by being there.

All that was half a century ago. I saw VW on half a dozen occasions after that, once in the Festival Hall exchanging a look with him. If I had been older and more confident I would have taken a step forward - that was all that was needed - and said "Thank you" to him but I just smiled and the moment passed. I was also at the first performance of the *Ninth Symphony* (many years later I discovered that my friend Leonard Friedman had been deputy leader of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra). Again, I was at that Prom performance of the *Ninth* that Michael Kennedy talks about in his book; I was one of the young people standing and applauding the old man just a few weeks before his death. A short time after that I was at Westminster Abbey for his memorial service, which Kennedy also mentions.

In the years that have followed I have never lost my affection for RVW or his music. Other enthusiasms have come, and some have, if not gone, at least receded and taken their place in my bulging case of musical treasures, some stashed away among a lot of other miscellaneous items, some more carefully placed and nurtured. Very little has disappeared completely but a lot has become just a part of the collection which I am glad to have but don't especially treasure. Some people are always there, of course: Beethoven, Brahms and so on. Some items have become more treasured over time. At the moment I would include in that category Russian church music and the later works of Dmitri Shostakovitch, but always there is Ralph Vaughan Williams. I do not distinguish between the music and the man; I find such a distinction impossible to make.

As a boy and a teenager I was quite pious and it so happened that the church I attended was very High Anglican (than which nothing can be higher - certainly not any Roman Catholic church I have been in). The hymn book was the English Hymnal and from that book I came to know *Come down, O love divine* and, particularly, *For All the Saints* and *Hail Thee, Festival Day*. When I first came to know these I could scarcely read music and the copy of the hymnal that I was given in church only had the words anyway. So I did not know anything about the composer of these hymns but I loved them, particularly the last two for their drive and energy and rhythmic interest. (They must have seemed extraordinarily revolutionary when they were first presented in churches: nothing could be more different from the dreary sanctimonies of the Sankey and Moodie school of hymn-writing.) Later, when I got to know more about matters musical, I came to see something of the overall qualities of the English Hymnal. As I imply, when I was a boy it did not seem to me to be a revolutionary book, since it was the book I was brought up on; that realisation grew, and it remains a profound influence, even now in my non-churchgoing days. I still love plainsong and Bach chorales and Weelkes and Tallis and Holst; in other words, the composers selected by Vaughan Williams for inclusion.

For a time, when I was in my teens, I preferred Holst, mainly on the strength of *The Planets*, which seemed the apex of colour and drama in music. Then came *The Perfect Fool* ballet music and what I still consider one of Holst's greatest works (and a shamefully neglected masterpiece), *The Hymn of Jesus*. As I came to know more of Holst's music, however, I came to recognise his limitations, as well as his strengths. With RVW the opposite has happened. This is not to denigrate Holst, whom I know Vaughan Williams loved and admired; simply to say, I think he lacks VW's breadth and depth. Holst occasionally touched greatness (*Saturn, The Hymn of Jesus, Egdon Heath*); Vaughan Williams often did (in at least six of the symphonies, in *Job*, *Sancta Civitas*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and I would name a few more).

I have not yet mentioned "Englishness". Maybe this is because, as time goes by, it is a factor that matters less and less. It mattered to him, of course, and we all know how deeply he was affected by English folksong and by the likes of Byrd and Weelkes and Tallis. We all know that this led to his creating works as revolutionary as *The Rite of Spring* - another work which has its roots deeply embedded in folksong.

As revolutionary as *Le Sacre*? I hear some people cry.

Certainly, I reply: nobody could have foreseen Stravinsky's great work; but then, nobody could have foreseen the *Tallis Fantasia* either. It doesn't blow you apart like *The Rite* but it was music like no other when it was first heard in Gloucester Cathedral nearly a century ago now. How perceptive that critic was who wrote of the first performance that he wasn't sure whether he was listening to music that was very old or very new. RVW's revolutions are often quiet: the *Pastoral Symphony* seems to me to be a more revolutionary work than the *Fourth*; certainly he needed to write the one before attempting the other (with *Job* and the *Piano Concerto* in between).

None of these works uses folksong, not even the *Pastoral* (though *The Rite of Spring* does). It is somewhere in the background, maybe, but as time goes by I am more content to leave it there. Similarly, I am more and more inclined to drop the "English" prefix. We don't call Haydn the great Austrian composer or Beethoven the great German composer. We don't go on about Tchaikovsky being a great Russian composer. Yet each of these composers was not immune to the influence of the folk music of his land. We know of the importance of Russian folksong to Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, of Hungarian to Kodály and Bartók, of Czech to Dvořák and Janáček, and so on and so on. But we don't feel the need to keep emphasising these composers' nationalities: it is there, it is acknowledged, so be it. What matters is the quality of the music each has produced, and that is independent of nationality.

So let it be with Ralph Vaughan Williams. He is not 'just' a great English composer; he is a great composer.

Jeff Aldridge

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND HIS FILM MUSIC FOR *49th PARALLEL*

by Richard Young

A small party of Nazis leave their U-boat U-37 (a full-size mock up) to raid the Hudson Bay Trading Post. (Photo courtesy of BFI)

From the first sound films in the 1930s the cinema attracted many of the leading composers of the day, particularly in Great Britain, and composers such as Arthur Benjamin, Arthur Bliss and Benjamin Britten found themselves in demand. In Britten's case for feature films, with the experimental GPO Film Unit, for which he produced innovative scores for small forces, of which his best known is *Night Mail* setting the poem of Auden. Arthur Bliss made an enormous impact with his striking and flamboyant score for the futuristic film *Things To Come* which in its day gave film music as a significant genre in its own right an enormous step forward. During and soon after WW2 most of the leading British composers of the day wrote film music including Walton, Rawsthorne, Frankel, Constant Lambert, Arnold Bax and John Ireland, generating a wide following among a public that flocked to the cinema on a regular basis. At this time film music was not highly rated by professional musicians. Even when Constant Lambert wrote in support of the film score he felt he had to say: "Film music should not be despised because it is inevitably more ephemeral and less important than symphonic music."

At the outbreak of WW2 RVW had acquired a unique stature, his enormous integrity and generous, expansive liberal humanist spirit in the tradition of his mentor Sir Hubert Parry made him all but officially our leading composer both morally as well as musically. He had already written a large body of music in almost all the major genres including 4 symphonies, opera, choral music, chamber music, ballets and had a wide following.

Writing the score for the film *49th Parallel* was RVW's first foray in the new genre of film scoring. In his late sixties he started this new "Indian Summer" career with great enthusiasm and interest. He was still at the height of his powers and exploring new avenues with 5 of his 9 symphonies still left to write.

The outbreak of war found RVW in a strangely intense mood less phlegmatic than was his usual outward appearance, his mind numbed by the possibilities of world catastrophe. He had now given up his teaching at the R.C.M. as war had reduced the college's numbers by half. He was already playing an active part in the Dorking Committee for refugees from Nazi oppression, which had started work in December 1938. The beginning of World War 2 for Britain on 3 September 1939 made him desperate for useful work. He immediately offered the use of his field to the District Council for allotments, reserving a patch for himself. He was one of the small committee who worked to put into practice Myra Hess's idea for lunchtime concerts in the National Gallery, London.

RVW working on his District Council Allotment near Dorking.

RVW had already "done his bit" for his country in the First World War. In 1914 he volunteered for the Army Medical Corps. He hated the war and knew he could have stayed in England, but he thought it would be avoiding his responsibility as a man, his duty as a citizen. He saw service in France with the Medical Corps and in March 1918 after a posting to Salonika he returned to France as a Subaltern on active service with the Artillery; this may have led to his increasing deafness in his later years. After the Armistice in November 1918, he was made Director of Music of the Ist Army BEF before being demobilised in February 1919.

RVW did not believe the artist or composer should live in splendid artistic isolation in an ivory tower but that his art or craft should be of use and service to the community and country. Film music, a new format for him, was one way he found he could service his country at war. In a broadcast on *The Composer in Wartime* in 1940 he suggested other ways, for he still had his vision of the musician as a vital part of the community and could not believe artists could be immune from what was happening around them. "I have known young composers refer with annoyance to this boring war" he said. "Are there not ways in which the composer without derogating from his art, without being untrue to himself, but still without that entire disregard for his fellows which characterises the artist in his supreme moments, can use his skill, his knowledge, his sense of beauty in the service of his fellow men?" He suggested works for voices and combinations of all manner of instruments which might be played by people whiling away the waiting hours of war. He followed his own advice and wrote the charming *Household Music* to be played on

whatever instruments were to hand. Through the tense early war years of 1941 and 1942 he composed mainly film music: *49th Parallel, Coastal Command*, *The People's Land* and *Flemish Farm*.

YOU HAVE "TILL WEDNESDAY"

RVW was looking around for some new stimulus to set his restless imagination alight. He had mentioned to Arthur Benjamin that he would like to "have a shot" at film music. Benjamin had passed this on to Muir Mathieson (a former pupil of RVW's, now Director of London Films), who telephoned one Saturday evening in 1940 and invited RVW to write the music for *49th Parallel*. On asking how long he could have to prepare it, he was told "Till Wednesday". This is rather reminiscent of Prime Minister Churchill's command on memoranda sent out by him to staff "Action this day!"

Thus started a new and successful career in film music, composing 11 film scores in all, *49th Parallel* (1940), *Coastal Command* (1942), *The People's Land* (1943), *Story of a Flemish Farm* (1943), *Stricken Peninsula* (1944), *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1946), *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948), *The Dim Little Island* (1949), *Bitter Springs* (1950), *The England of Elizabeth* (1955) and *The Vision of William Blake* (1957).

Vaughan Williams's philosophy and method of composing for films was very different from those of today or even other fellow English composers such as Alan Rawsthorne who wrote the music for the WW2 Navy epic *The Cruel Sea*. Film composers usually are given strict timing schedules after the film has been shot and cut; down to the last second, i.e. the composer is asked to write 4 mins 32 seconds for a scene here, 7 mins 51 seconds for another scene there. This is very economical and efficient and means no superfluous music is composed and wasted. However this fragmented bitsy approach must break up and straight jacket cramp the expansive, creative flow and imagination. RVW's approach was to steep himself in the spirit and atmosphere of the film whilst it was in preparation and give full rein to his expansive creative imagination producing music often of symphonic proportions in whole suites of music. In fact much of his music for the film *Scott of the Antarctic* was reworked to make his 7th *Antarctic Symphony*. By this method RVW produced great haunting, atmospheric film music, work of a great composer at the height of his power not least in power of orchestration as well as thematic invention. However the downside of this was that his scores were savagely cut and fragmented to fit the film after it was finally cut.

The Directors of *Coastal Command* recognised the quality of the music written for them and more or less cut the film to fit the music, but the *Scott of the Antarctic* music was notoriously savagely cut. Of course even when used the music can often be *sotto voce*, inaudible as in the *Lake in the Mountain* scene in *49th Parallel* and often overlaid and drowned out by dialogue or other sound effects. This is why RVW's scores need to be performed and heard in their uncut entirety to realise their full stature.

Having written his scores using his imagination RVW was practical enough and co-operative to alter details at the Directors' request. He gives a witty summary of his methods in an essay *Composing for the films* written a few years later:-

> "The best way to write film music is to ignore the details and to intensify the spirit of the whole situation or by a continuous stream of music. This stream can be modified (often at rehearsal!) by points of colour superimposed on the flow. For example your music is illustrating Columbus's voyage and you have a sombre tune symbolising the weariness of the crew and the doubts of Columbus.
>
> But the producer says, 'I want a little bit of sunshine music for that flash on the waves.'
>
> If you are wise, you will send the orchestra away for five minutes, which will delight them. Then you look at the score to find out what instruments are unemployed – say, the harp and the muted trumpets. You write in your sunlight at the appropriate second, you recall the orchestra. You then play the altered version, while the producer marvels at your skill in composing what appears to him to be an entirely new piece of music in so short a time".

RVW found writing film music an excellent discipline. He said, "when the hand is lazy the mind often gets lazy as well". He also said "A film producer would make short work of Mahler's interminable codas or Dvořák's five endings to each movement". He recognised great possibilities if the author, director, photographer and composer worked together from the beginning. He said "It is only when this is achieved that the film will come into its own as one of the finest of the fine arts." VW obviously thoroughly relished and enjoyed the challenge of writing for this new medium and was on very good terms with those he worked with in the industry. Muir Mathieson, Ernest Irving, Anthony Asquith, Michael Balcon and Ian Dalrymple (who made *Coastal Command*) became his friends. He came round to actually enjoying the nit-picking practicalities of working for film as well as having a broad imaginative creative vision. While working on *Flemish Farm* with Muir Mathieson and Jeffrey Dell, the director, he coined the phrase "plug-time" for his "leitmotif", and arrived one day full of excitement over his ideas for copying with the 1/3 second that appears on all film music timing sheets. He added an occasional 1/8 bar to get rid of the 1/3 sec. It had the effect of "God save our (1/8) G-Gracious Queen". Jeffrey Dell was one of several directors who found that RVW invited criticism at the recording sessions and was ready and willing to alter his score on the spot to meet their ideas. He did this from the first film, *49th Parallel*, to the last on which he was involved actively *The England of Elizabeth* in 1956.

The Music for *49th Parallel*

RVW composed a suite of 16 sections of music for the film. They are given below with their use or non-use on the film track.

1. Prelude – used for opening sequence.
2. Prologue – only used in small chunks in the film.
3. Control Room Alert – only a part of this was actually used.
4. Hudson Bay Post – used complete with a repeat of the introduction.
5. Lost In The Store – not used at all.
6. Death of Kuhnecke – used complete.
7. Anna's Volkslied – used but Glynis Johns didn't sing the words.
8. Wheat Harvest – used.
9. Winnipeg I - mostly used but difficult to hear at times.
10. Winnipeg II – used.
11. Nazi March – used.
12. Indian Music I – used.
13. Indian Music II – not used.
14. Indian Music III – not used.
15. Nazis on the run and the Lake in the Mountain – used.
16. Epilogue – used over end titles.

The scoring for the suite is as follows:-

2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling cor anglais), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contra bassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussion (xylophone), bass drum, side drum, tenor drum, cymbals, tubular tam tam and Indian drums, piano, harp, strings, soprano solo.

THE MUSIC

Prelude

There is a short introductory orchestral flourish then the main broad expansive cantilena-like tune comes in. This is a beautiful long flowing tune that slowly unfolds. It is imploring, tender, lyrical, serene, noble, buoyant and uplifting. It has all the hallmarks of RVW's composition teacher and mentor, Hubert Parry, whom VW started studying with at the Royal College of Music, London, in 1891. It has a similar methodic inflexion and feel to works of a noble uplifting patriotic nature by Parry, such as the choral work *I was glad* and the hymns *Jerusalem* and *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*. The tune is given an uplift at keypoints by

the use of triplet rhythms. Triplets as used judiciously to vary rhythm nearly always seem to uplift music. The theme keeps coming back and back again in slightly varied form. There is lovely tender contrapuntal writing for the horns. It is given fuller treatment on the orchestra and then ends with a powerful precipitate cymbal clash.

This beautiful tune was one of RVW's most successful patriotic war-time pieces which, with words by Harold Child, soon reappeared as the patriotic choral song *The New Commonwealth*. The prelude was quickly issued on a 10 inch 78 record. The long flowing cantilena could be considered RVW's representation of the liberal democracy ideal expressed in a broad, expansive, generous, noble, uplifting way, the beauty of the music as a metaphor for the moral high tone and ideals represented.

Epilogue

This is used for the film end titles. Unexpectedly it is somehow more powerful and haunting than the *Prelude* although based broadly on the same democracy tune material. It is as if after the trail of violence, bloodshed, deaths the Nazis leave behind, then we are older and wiser, chastened and saddened by the traumatic evil experience. The treatment is even more intense, imploring, tender, poignant and bittersweet, haunting, wistfully beautiful. It is about twice as long as the prelude and opens very sombrely with a drum roll (not unlike the distant drumming of approaching Nazi bombers) followed by dark string tone. There is a very intensive interjection of string tremolando, which is a very dramatic cinematic film music effect. The democracy melody theme is taken up by brass and woodwind against a lovely, tender counterpoint on strings, then an even fuller, broader treatment is given full rein by full orchestra as if this noble theme just can't be left.

Nazi March

RVW uses a downward moving theme to portray the Nazis in a negative light. Tchaikovsky uses extensively downward moving themes to produce doom and gloom and angst in his *Pathetique Symphony*. This is almost like the use of Wagner's "Leitmotif" a recurring theme to portray certain characters or ideas. Wagner was very dear to Hitler's heart and his music was given great prominence in Nazi Germany. He was strongly antisemitic and used to conduct Mendelssohn (a Jewish composer banned and condemned by the Nazis) wearing white gloves which he discarded at the end of the performance to get rid of the supposed contamination. Notoriously his *Mastersinger* opera overture was performed at Auschwitz concentration camp by a brass band as trainloads of Jews arrived to their unspeakable horrendous fate. Elgar used leitmotifs extensively in his oratorios *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*.

Leslie Howard as Philip Armstrong Scott is held at gunpoint by one of the Nazis in his tent by the lake in the mountains. Note Picasso painting in background.

The Lake in the Mountains

Unfortunately this is almost inaudible on the film after a long slow arpeggio introduction ascending (as contrasted to the downward moving Nazi theme) and then a calm static section which represents the tranquil, pure, limpid lake waters before the Nazis arrived to contaminate the area. RVW doubles up his melody in intervals of a 4th and 5th. This gives an "organum" like quality - the name given to early medieval music which doubled up the melody at these intervals as well as at the octave. The introduction of the intervals of a 3rd and 6th was considered to be predominately Germanic in origin. Perhaps consciously or unconsciously RVW was having a technical dig at the Germans suggesting a pre-Germanic purity in music.

Videos and CDs Available

1. Video. The film is available from Carlton (www.carltonvisual.com) the film score is played by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Muir Mathieson.
2. The Film Suite. The Chandos CD continuing their complete recordings of VW's film music came out in August 2004.

Cover to Marco Polo Film Music of RVW CD. Laurence Olivier as 'Johnnie; the Hudson Bay Company trapper argues with Lieutenant Hinth played by Eric Portman.

3. Prelude. This is on the Marco Polo CD 8.233665, *RVW Film Music* the RTE Concert Orchestra conducted by Andrew Penny. It also has *Story of a Flemish Farm*, *Coastal Command Suite* and *Three Portraits from the England of Elizabeth*.
4. Epilogue. This is available on a Pearl CD (Pavilion Records Ltd). It is the original recording, Muir Mathieson/LSO. The disc also features historic performances of *Symphony No.6* (Boult), *Scott of the Antarctic* and *The Loves of Joanna Godden* conducted by Ernest Irving – Philharmonic Orchestra and *Coastal Command* and *The Story of a Flemish Farm* BBC Northern Orchestra conducted by Muir Mathieson.

Scores/Piano Music

Oxford University Press has published the score to the prelude and epilogue. A brass band arrangement is still available.

The *Lake in the Mountains* was made into a piano solo by RVW and published by O.U.P. It was dedicated to the British pianist Phyllis Sellick.

BACKGROUND TO THE MAKING OF THE FILM - FILM AS WARTIME PROPAGANDA

The main raison d'être behind the film and its location in North America was to try and influence the United States to join Britain and its allies in the fight against Hitler's Nazi Germany. Canada as part of the Commonwealth was already involved. In the early period of WW2 Germany violated the neutrality of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Yugoslavia. The U.S. soon shifted its policy of impartial

neutrality to the one of aid to the Western allies. When German victory threatened Britain the U.S. violated its neutral obligations and sent 50 old destroyers and other war materials to the British. U.S. opinion was very sympathetic to Britain after hearing heart-stopping dramatic radio broadcast reports about the Battle of Britain and Luftwaffe bombing of London by legendary U.S. reporter Ed Murrow in the summer of 1940. Churchill had cultivated a warm relationship with American President F.D. Roosevelt, but although very sympathetic to the British plight he had difficulty persuading his colleagues at Washington out of their world isolationist position. Roosevelt managed to pass the "lend-lease" Act on 11th March 1941: it provided that the president of the U.S. could transfer weapons, food, or equipment to any nation whose fight against the Axis aided the defeat of the U.S. President Fanklin D Roosvelt described the act as lending your hose to your neighbour to put out a fire before your own house caught fire also and burnt down. Churchill described this generosity as "The most unsordid act of any nation in history". From 1940-45 the U.S. gave over $50 billion in supplies and equipment to Britain and the Soviet Union much of it under the lend-lease program.

However Churchill and Britain really desperately wanted and needed the U.S. to bring its military, moral and industrial strength fully on the side of the Allies, i.e. to formally declare war on the Axis powers. The film was a piece of enjoyable and exciting propaganda, with a touch of Hitchcockian suspense and drama, to try and help influence the U.S. to change its position. It was the only feature film officially sponsored by the Ministry of Information (i.e. Propaganda Unit), although it had to compete with mainstream Hollywood films, such as *Gone With The Wind*, *Rebecca* and the *Philadelphia Story* showing at British cinemas; however, it became a box office runaway hit. It was released successfully after the U.S. had officially come into the war as *The Invaders* in the U.S. It opened at the Odeon cinema, Leicester Square, London on October 8th 1941. Within 2 months the U.S. had declared war on the Axis powers Germany and Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbour December 7th 1941 by Japan.

Enter "A Man Who Knows Something About Pictures"
Sir Kenneth Clark

Kenneth Clark was then director of the National Art Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London. He had helped organise the classical music recital concerts at the gallery, which carried on even during heavy bombing and provided much valued and appreciated spiritual and cultural nourishment during those dark and dangerous days. He said in his autobiography *The Other Half* he took no credit for organising these concerts except saying that there should be a concert "every day" and negotiating the obstruction formally put in his way by govenment departments. Myra Hess who gave many recitals as pianist was also a backbone. Again in his autobiography Clark said "Myra gave the first concert and played Beethoven's *Appassionata Sonata* and her own arrangement of Bach's *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*. I confess that in common with half the audience, I was in tears. This is what we had all been waiting for - an assertion of eternal values". This famous concert series really gave the impetus for the formation of the 3rd programme (later BBC radio 3) formed just after the war.

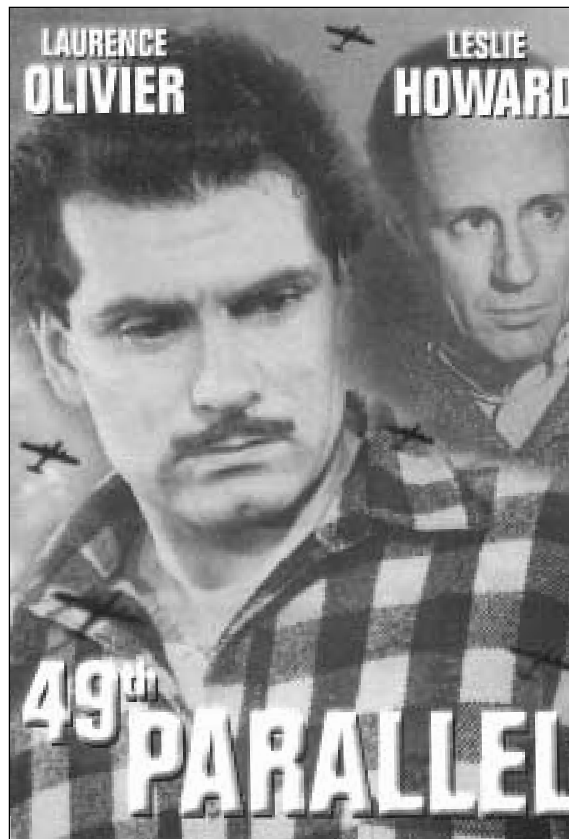
Kenneth Clark filming early in World War II

The best lecturer in Britain

Kenneth Clark was asked to replace the unimaginative Sir Joseph Ball as director of the films division of the Ministry of Information (MOI) which was responsible for numerous documentaries and information films; it was considered that he was a man "that knew something about pictures" even if of a rather different kind. There was not much enthusiasm for Clark who was viewed with suspicion as a highbrow dilettante (a bit like the character played by Leslie Howard in the film, Philip Armstrong-Scott a private art collector) with no experience of film production at all. However he was a respected member of the British intelligentsia and liable to be more appreciative of the documentary form. After the war he made the seminal and all time classic T.V. documentary series *Civilisation* commissioned by Sir David Attenborough when he was director of BBC2 shown in 1969.

His lack of experience of the film industry did not prevent him from vigorous intervention, presenting a paper on the use of feature films as propaganda, coercing the Treasury into providing finances for a programme of feature films, although in the event *49th Parallel* was the only film made given official resourcing by the MOI. Clark was promoted to controller of Home Propaganda and his position of Films Officer was filled by Jack Beddington who had been head of publicity of Shell Oil.

Feature Films As Propaganda



Film Poster and cover slip from Carlton Video

Feature films appeared to present more intractable problems than either newsreels or documentaries. There were unresolved questions as to whether entertainment and propaganda could be combined. Clark told his policy committee "if we renounce interest in entertainment as such, we might be deprived of a valuable weapon for getting across our propaganda". In his paper *Programme for Film Propaganda* he stressed the importance of documentaries and newsreel but also proposed that feature films be used as covert propaganda. Three types of film were recommended – documentary inclined stories about aspects of the war and the war effort, films celebrating British ideas and traditions, and films dealing with British life and character. He suggested the idea of a film about minesweepers to producer/director Michael Powell, but Powell persuaded Clark that a film set in Canada would be more useful. He argued that Canada's example in coming into the war might be used to persuade the USA to do likewise and with Emeric Pressburger he devised the *49th Parallel* story involving 6 stranded survivors of a U-boat crew making their way across Canada and coming into contact with various types of Canadians as well as an Englishman living in Canada. In the process Nazi ideology is exposed as brutal and stupid while the Canadians and the Englishman show tolerance, kindness and resourceful intelligence.

In August 1940 while *49th Parallel* was being made a parliamentary select committee on Government expenditure reported on the activities of the MOI Films Division and recommended that no further commitment should be made in this area "unless there was clear evidence it was making a contribution to the war effort commensurate with its expenditure". Despite the fact that the film was the top box-office film of 1941 no further large-scale investments were made in feature films. However such films as *Millions Like Us* and the *Way Ahead* were effectively sponsored by the Ministry of Information and carried significant war propaganda messages. If Hitler had managed to successfully invade Britain one can't help thinking he would have ultimately been defeated by the Treasury, our ultimate secret army and weapon; nothing changes!

Crude or Realistic, Sophisticated Propaganda?

Critics were uneasy about a return to the jingoistic film propaganda of the First World War, not only because it negated all the advances made in the use of films for educational and informational purposes by the British documentary movement but because it would not be acceptable abroad, particularly in the USA. Films like *49th Parallel* and *Convoy* were welcomed as harbingers of a new style of cinema. Crude melodramatic comic book dialogue such as "Get up you filthy Hun I want to hit you again" as in the film *Ships With Wings* would have no place in the scripts of war film writers Emeric Pressburger, Terence Rattigan and Noël Coward. For director Powell, realism was an essential part of doing his job as professionally as possible. In the film Powell had his construction chief Syd Streeter build a life-size replica of a German U-boat out of canvas, wood and steel, it was reassembled off the Newfoundland Coast and he proceeded to blow it up using 3 –1,000 pound bombs donated by the Canadian Airforce. Powell also used actual experienced Canadian Broadcast Service announcers to read the radio public warning messages about the Nazis on the run to help give that extra air of realism and authenticity.

Are All Germans Bad? Or "Vansittartism" ?

In the *Black Record,* a series of broadcasts made for the Overseas Service of the BBC in 1940, Lord Vansittart had argued that the Nazis were a new variation on Germany's militaristic culture, it was not an evil elite but the whole German population who were guilty of the war. "Vansittartism" as it came to be called was never universally accepted. During the war films like *Pastor Hall*, *Freedom Radio* and *49th Parallel* had striven with official backing to differentiate between "Good Germans" and "Nazis". In the film Vogel played by Nial McGinnis is portrayed as a simple, decent, kindly country lad. He presses a crucifix into Johnie the Trapper's (Lawrence Olivier) hand when he's tied up by the other Nazis, a small touching, considerate act of human kindness and humanity that can mean so much under such trying circumstances. He wishes to stay on and continue work as a baker at the German speaking Hutterite settlement but is tried by a kangaroo court and summarily executed by the other Nazis for treachery and desertion of their cause.

Kenneth Clark in a paper called "It's the same old Hun" argued that "It would seem in our interest to stress the very great difference between the Germany of 1914-1918 and today, by pointing out how in the First World War all the best elements of German culture and science were still in Germany and were supporting the German cause, whereas now they are outside Germany and supporting us". This was written in January 1941 when large numbers of these "best elements of German culture and science" were still in the internment camps where the "collar the lot" policy of the previous summer had deposited them. But their supporters were eventually to secure their release by stressing such a policy damaged Britain's image as a beacon of tolerance and civilisation, qualities stressed and explored in the film, although transferred in location to our commonwealth ally Canada.

The Film 49th Parallel

"Across the great American continent there runs a line drawn not by bloodshed and strife but by the common consent of the free peoples of two great countries. It is not a barrier – it is a meeting place – it is the 49th Parallel – the largest undefended frontier in the world."

The film gets its title from the 49th Parallel of latitude which runs from Vancouver at the Pacific Ocean in the West across the prairie lands of Canada and the U.S.A. It forms the man-made border between the two countries. The border runs roughly North West to South East through the Great Lakes on the East side of the continent to end up a border on the Atlantic Ocean side between New Brunswick, Canada and Maine in the U.S.A.

Although a fictional story, although very plausible, the film has a parallel in reality of a German combatant crossing the 49th from Canada to the U.S.A. in WWII.

Franz Von Werra was a Luftwaffe pilot shot down in Kent during the Battle of Britain September 1940. He was the only P.O.W. to escape from Britain back to Germany if by a roundabout route. A film called *The One That Got Away* was made about his daring escapes by Rank in 1957.

He escaped twice from internment camps in the North of England and the second time, impersonating a Dutch pilot serving in the RAF who had crash-landed, he demanded to be taken to the nearest RAF station where he was only caught and stopped in the nick of time trying to take off and escape in a Hurricane. He was shipped to Canada but managed to jump the P.O.W. train he was on and got across the border into the U.S. in a rowing boat. Similarly to the film *49th Parallel's* ending, fearing the Americans might send him back to Canada he fled to Mexico, and via Peru and Spain got back to Germany. He was in service with 53 fighter squadron over the Russian front but in the autumn of 1941 on coastal defence duties in Holland his aircraft crashed and he was killed.

Making the Film on Location

Heading for the 49th Parallel, the border between Canada and North America, to scout locations, Pressburger came up with the plot of the film "en route", and a starring cast was quickly contacted. Laurence Olivier, Leslie Howard, Anton Walbrook, Raymond Massey and Elisabeth Bergner all agreed to appear in the film at a basic minimum fee instead of their usual salaries, although Howard apparently later insisted on a percentage agreement, eventually met by Powell and Pressburger. The role of fanatical Nazi Lieutenant Hirth was to have been taken by Powell's friend Esmond Knight until the actor enlisted in the Navy. Instead, Hirth was played by Eric Portman, an experienced stage actor who had survived an improbable screen debut as 'Gypsy Carlos' in *Maria Marten* or the *Murder in the Red Barn* with Tod Slaughter in 1935, and had made only four films over the next six years. Following his appearance in *49th Parallel*, Eric Portman was voted into second place behind Laurence Olivier in the "Picturegoer" Annual Awards, prompting the magazine to run an article entitled 'Who Is He?'

Left to right: Laurence Olivier, Anton Wallbrook, Leslie Howard and Eric Portman between takes, as this combination doesn't occur in the film.

U-boat crew member Vogel played by Niall Macbinnis pressing a Crucifix into Johnnie the Trapper's hand after the other Nazis have tied him up.

At the Hudson Bay Trading Post. Johnnie the Trappist (Laurence Olivier seated) argues with Nazi Lieutenant Hinton. Eric Portman in German Naval uniform now. The Hudson Bay Factor played by Finlay Currie left, U-boat Kommandant Bernsdorff, played by Michael George right.

Kommandant Bernsdorff holds Johnnie the trapper at gun point

For the first time on a major production, Powell was his own producer, and filming progressed as and when actors were available and weather conditions allowed. Raymond Massey had joined the Canadian army, so his scenes were shot at the Associated Sound News Studios in Montreal, while opening shots in Hudson Bay had to be caught before the ice appeared, and the Hutterite scenes were to coincide with the harvesting of the crop. Most other scenes could be put together in Denham, apart from those featuring the Nazi soldiers, which had to be filmed across the length and breadth of Canada. The sole 'casualty' of the production was Elisabeth Bergner, who 'defected' across the border to the United States instead of returning to London after filming her scenes in Canada. Glynis Johns replaced her, although most of the outdoor distance shots featuring Miss Bergner could still be used.

With filming completed, David Lean was brought in as a Film Editor, and cut the film to slightly over two hours with not a frame wasted. Frederick Young, Director of Cinematography on *49th Parallel*, was later to become David Lean's favourite cameraman, winning Academy Awards for his work on *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *Ryan's Daughter*.

Press Reviews

Released in November 1941, *49th Parallel* continued the run of successes for Powell and Pressburger – even more so when issued in the United States as *The Invaders* the following April. A huge success, it won Emeric Pressburger an Academy Award for Best Original Story and also received nominations for Best Screenplay and Best Film, losing to *Mrs Miniver*. Despite this mark of approval, there were some detractors who felt the German crewmen to be too sympathetically drawn, although the brutality of Hirth's character is clearly shown throughout, even to the extent of executing one of his own men as a 'traitor'. 'This was one of the very first important films about the ideology of the Nazis' Pressburger recalled. 'We were fighting for our lives and for everything else. The Nazis were hateful sorts of fellows. Now all this had faded a bit (but) you only have to see the newsreels… But even among those Nazis we had a sympathetic sort of fellow'.

In January 1942, Powell defended *49th Parallel* to *The Times* who suggested that the film had 'not justified the time and money that were expended on its production', by pointing out that the picture had not yet been released in either Canada, the other Dominions or the United States, but had recouped its entire cost in England alone after only three months. This 'justifies the faith that the then Minister of Information placed in our venture', he continued, adding, 'It may also do much to hearten those gentlemen of the Select Committee of National Expenditure who, long before the film was completed and its results could possibly have been foreseen by any but those closely concerned with the making of it, announced that they regarded "this kind of venture with the gravest

misgivings". *49th Parallel* went on to be named as the top grossing film in the UK for 1941.

> Powell concluded:
> *49th Parallel* is an adventure story, and a bit more. The bit more interests me, because it makes and mars. The difficulty is that the natural heroes of its adventure are the campaigning Nazis. The further they get… the more inclined shall we be to sympathise. However, if the case for Democracy, a thrilling adventure, a constellation of actors and a landscape album can be crammed into one film, here it is.

New Statesman, 18 October 1941

An important and effective propaganda film… the strongest possible indictment against Nazism. Script, by Emeric Pressburger, is direct and forceful. Michael Powell… has managed to maintain his stature among the top directors.

Variety

Michael Powell is to be congratulated on his persistence with this at first apparently ill-starred film. It is an admirable piece of work from every point of view and credit should be given to everyone connected with the finished product. The acting throughout is admirable; even so there is a temptation to say the honours go to Eric Portman as the lead of the Nazis. His performance right through the film puts him in the star class of film actors.

Film Details – Cast and Summary of Plot

Dedication:-

The dedication at the beginning of the film reads as follows:-

"The film is dedicated to Canada and the Canadians all over the Dominion who helped to make it, to the Governments of the U.S.A. and of the United Kingdom who made it possible and to the actors who believed in our story and came from all parts of the world to play in it."

It was made at the Associated Sound News Studios, Montreal and at D & P Studios, Denham, England, produced by Ortus Films.

RVW's score was conducted by Muir Mathieson with the London Symphony Orchestra.

49th Parallel
(US: *The Invaders*)

(1941, 123 minutes, US: 104 minutes) Ortus Films/Ministry of Information.
Producer and Director: Michael Powell; Original Story and Screenplay: Emeric Pressburger; Scenario: Rodney Ackland, Emeric Pressburger; Director of Photography: Frederick Young; Film Editor: David Lean; Backgrounds: Osmond Borrowdale; Art Director: David Rawnsley; Associate Art Director: Sydney Streeter; Music Score: Ralph Vaughan Williams; Music Director: Muir Mathieson; Sound Supervisor: A.W. Watkins.

Cast: Leslie Howard (Philip Armstrong Scott), Laurence Olivier (Johnnie, The Trapper), Raymond Massey (Andy Brock), Anton Walbrook (Peter), Eric Portman (Lieutenant Hirth), Richard George (Kommandant Bernsdorff), Raymond Lovell (Lieutenant Kuhnecker), Niall MacGinnis (Vogel), Peter Moore (Krantz), John Chandos (Lohrmann), Basil Appleby (Jahner), Finlay Currie (Factor), Ley On (Nick, the Eskimo), Glynis Johns (Anna), Charles Victor (Andreas), Frederick Piper (David), Tawera Moana (George the Indian), Eric Clavering (Art), Charles Rolfe (Bob), Theodore Salt, O.W. Fonger (US Customs Officers), Vincent Massey (Narrator).

Summary of Plot

A German submarine is destroyed in Hudson Bay, leaving a five-man shore party, led by Lieutenant Kuhnecker, stranded on Canadian soil. Reaching a trading post, they overpower the Factor and Canadian trapper Johnnie Barras, who attempts to shout a warning over the short wave radio and is shot. A plane sent to investigate is hijacked by the Germans, but crashes into a lake, killing Kuhnecker. Lieutenant Hirth takes command, leading the four survivors to a Hutterite camp of German refugees led by Peter. Hirth asks his 'fellow Germans' for their help in spreading the movement across Canada, but Peter denounces him as a fanatic. When Vogel chooses to remain with the community, he is executed by his comrades as a deserter.

At Vancouver Kranz is arrested by the Mounted Police while Hirth and Lohrmann escape to the Rockies. There they encounter Englishman Philip Armstrong Scott, researching Indian folklore. Taken captive, Scott manages to break free and capture Lohrmann. Alone, Hirth boards a freight train headed for the neutral United States. Also in the car is Canadian soldier Andy Brock. At the border, Hirth surrenders to customs officers and asks to be taken to the German embassy, but Brock persuades them to wheel the carriage back into Canada where he can show the German what he thinks of the Nazi order.

"The Archers"

Left Michael Powell, Right Eric Pressburgher. Shot on the staircase of the massive Canterbury Cathedral set constructed at Stage 4 at the Denham Studios for the P and P film "A Canterbury Tale" 1944.

Emeric Pressburger 1902 – 1988

He was born 5th December 1902 at Mikole, Hungary. An amateur violinist, as a boy he also showed prodigious mathematical skills. He wrote screenplays for German and French films but with the rise of Nazism moved to England on a stateless passport in 1935. In 1938 he was recruited to write the script for *The Spy in Black* for director Michael Powell. With Powell he formed a production company called *The Archers* and wrote and produced some of Britain's most prestigious films of the 1940s and early 1950s. This highly successful partnership was amicably dissolved in 1956. Some of their famous joint films include: *49th Parallel (*1941), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) (a film hated by Churchill!), *A Canterbury Tale* (1947), *I Know Where I'm Going* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948) and *The Battle of the River Plate* (1956).

Michael Powell 1905 – 1990

He was born in 1905 near Canterbury, Kent the son of a hop grower. He showed an early interest in making films but started his working life as a bank clerk in 1922. He did still photography on Alfred Hitchcock's film *Champagne* 1928 but his first substantial film was *The Edge of the World* 1937, a drama notable for its semi-documentary realism and authenticity. This attracted the notice of Korda where he met Pressburger, they then worked together on the film *The Spy in Black* 1939 an espionage thriller that enjoyed box-office success in the U.S.A. as *U-Boat 29*. He also worked on *One of our Aircraft is Missing* 1941.

Does the Film Succeed as "Overt" or "Covert" Propaganda?

The film is remarkably complex, subtle and multi-layered, and a great deal of very careful thought has been made in a creative, imaginative way to get its ostensible propaganda message across. Technically the film is termed episodic i.e. it moves through a sequence of seemingly unrelated episodes or scenes and actions. But there are complex, underlying, subliminal connecting, unifying factors going on.

Thus the propaganda message is put across in 2 main ways "overtly" and "covertly" with great success. The great philosopher Aristotle said "A hidden link or connection is stronger than an open or obvious one", thus I believe the 3rd area is perhaps the strongest of all subconsciously using the Canadian landscape as symbolic metaphor".

Actions speak louder than words

The first way of putting the message across is the familiar powerful one of "Actions speak louder than words". The group of Nazis or "Invaders" (as the film was titled in the U.S.A.) seem to violate and devastate everything in their path. The *New Statesman* in its review of the film likened them to "Cobras in a Surrey garden". True to their violent, brutal, inhuman, fanatical ideology, where the ends always justify the horrendous evil means, they murder their way across Canada managing to kill 11 people. They start with Nick the Eskimo at the Hudson Bay Company and then kill one of their own, Vogel, at the Hutterite settlement who is too humane and gentle for their extremist cause. This trail of brutality is left to speak for itself and is reflected in Vaughan Williams's more sombre epilogue music at the end of the film.

The War of Words, Ideas and Values

Both the Nazis and various people, groups and individuals they meet across Canada, are given set speeches or orations ranging the totalitarian Nazi ideology and fanaticism against tolerant, peace-loving, humane, liberal democracy ideals and ethos. The Nazis are given quite a lot of lines to express themselves fully, i.e. to hang themselves by their own rope so to speak. This is mainly in the person of Lieutenant Hirth brilliantly, convincingly and sinisterly played by Eric Portman. At the Hutterite settlement, Vogel the decent, human German shows concern and remorse at the deaths and suffering the Nazis have already inflicted . He says "The ships we sank, the women and children, the lifeboat we shelled, what you did to the Eskimos, unarmed men shot in the back".

The Hitlerette Lieutenant Hirth replies totally uncompromisingly and without a trace of compassion or humanity "You forget Vogel, we're at war, you can't expect to win without the methods of TOTAL WARFARE. Men, woman and children are all our enemies and must be treated as such; did you not read what Bismarck said 'leave them only their eyes to weep with'."

Eric Portman (1903 – 1969) gives a powerful tour-de-force throughout the film. Born in 1903 he played leads early in his career - usually haughty, cynical, aristocrats. Later he played character parts often villainous but even when playing good characters he was formidable. Other films of his include *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Moonlight Sonata* (1937), *One of Our Aircraft is Missing, Squadron Leader X*, *We Dive at Dawn*, *Millions Like Us* (1943) where he played a bluff foreman in a Midlands aircraft factory, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *Great Day* (1945).

His next poisonous, pernicious peroration is at a gathering of the Hutterite community which the Nazis have stumbled across on their fugitive march across Canada.

The Hutterites are a German speaking religious sect who believe in common ownership of goods following the example of early Christians "who had all things in common" ACTS 2.44. They were formed by Jacob Hutter in 1529 in Moravia as a branch of the Anabaptists. They were persecuted and some settled in the U.S. in 1874. Many migrated to Canada in 1918 to the Prairie provinces such as Alberta. They lead simple lives as farmers, meet daily for worship and live in "Bruderhofs" i.e. communities for about 85 people. They don't believe in war or violence. Having travelled thousands of miles from their homeland to escape religious intolerance, their leader Peter played by Anton Walbrook, has little time or sympathy for Lieutenant Hirths call to join the Nazi cause as people of Germanic descent.

Lieutenant Hirth ends his appeal to the gathered Hutterites to join the Nazi cause with "I am talking about the greatest idea in history, the supremacy of the Nordic race, the German people, Heil Hitler!"

Peter the Hutterite leader counters this in measured, quiet, dignified, almost melodious tones – "We are only one of many foreign settlements in Canada escaping racial and political persecution. All found security, peace, tolerance and understanding whereas in Europe it is your beloved Führer's pride to have stamped out. Children here grow up in a new background, with new horizons, without being forced into uniforms. While in Europe there is not a hole big enough for a mouse to breathe".

Anton Walbrook's most famous role was of course in the film *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941) where he played a Polish airman who gives up his brilliant career as a concert pianist in America to fight in the Battle of Britain. Richard Addinsell wrote the *Warsaw Concerto* for the film. Walbrook was later the ballet impresario in the P and P film *The Red Shoes*.

Only 2 Nazis are left on the run when they meet the character Philip Armstrong Scott, played by Leslie Howard in his wigwam in the Lake in the Mountain scene. The character Howard plays is a somewhat improbable caricature so cultured and refined to the point of becoming foppish and effete. However several important areas and ideas contrasting open, tolerant democracy and totalitarian, oppressive control-obsessed dictatorships are explored. First of all he is a private art collector and dilettante going about his own business without interference or a need for fanatical involvement with the state, party politics etc. More importantly the issue of totalitarian state control, interference, dictatorship and suppression of art, literature and music is alluded to.

Philip Armstrong Scott has paintings by Matisse and Picasso in his wigwam and is reading a book by the famous German author Thomas Mann (1875-1955) who went into exile in the U.S.A. during the Nazi era. The Nazis pronounced these artists decadent and banned them along with the composer Mendelssohn (as he was Jewish) and with countless others. The Nazi period in Europe saw great bonfires of banned books whilst relentlessly putting their own narrow evil racist propaganda in the place of a plurality of views. Similar relentless state control, dictatorship and leadership went on in Stalin's Communist Soviet Union. Dimitri Shostakovich one of the U.S.S.R's most important composers was attacked in 1935 in "Pravda" the communist's party's daily newspaper. It condemned his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* as "A leftist mess instead of human music, in which the composer rushes into the jungles of musical confusion, at times reaching complete cacophony". The party had asserted its power and Shostakovich felt the need to head his *5th Symphony* written in 1937 with:- "A Soviet artist's reply to just criticism". He is said to have lived in a constant state of fear of hearing a knock on the door at his flat to be taken away to a prison camp. He had his bags permanently packed. Such can be the awesome control of the state over artistic freedom and choice in a totalitarian state. In his wigwam the 2 Nazis, Lieutenant Hirth and Lohrman hold Scott at gunpoint. Scott says "Wars come, wars go but art goes on forever". Lieutenant Hirth says "There is no fight in them they are soft and degenerate through and through".

Seeing a copy of the novel *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, Hirth says "We kicked this one out of the Reich years ago".

The tables are turned when help arrives for Scott, he says its "Two brave Nazis against eleven million Canadians". He enters a cave and fires a gun against Lohrman who fires back at him. With a wry touch of humour as he fires each shot he says that's for Thomas Mann, that's for Matisse, that's for Picasso, that one's for me!" He says "Its one armed, superman against one decadent democrat". There is an echo of Britain's spineless appeasement period in relation to Hitler before WW2 i.e. anything to have a quiet time, but later the Churchill stubborn bulldog spirit,

backbone and determination came out in the British people when pushed against the wall. Leslie Howard was well known and loved by both North American cinema goers and British audiences. Although born in 1893 London to Hungarian immigrants he came to epitomise the perfect Englishman to American audiences in the 1930s playing against some of Hollywood's most glamorous ladies. He combined the image of dreamy romantic poet and effective intellectual. He starred as Ashley Wilkes playing opposite Olivia de Havilland in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). He had played the lead in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) and starred in *Intermezzo* (1939) opposite Ingrid Bergman. He was something of a matinee idol. During the war he returned to Britain. He reworked his Pimpernel theme in the film *Pimpernel Smith* (1939), where he saves victims of Nazi oppression in Germany underestimated and treated with contempt by the Nazis as a bumbling, dreamy, harmless, intellectual.

In 1942 he produced, directed and took the leading part in his own film *The First of the Few* about R J Mitchell's battle against cancer to finish of the design of his brilliant brainchild the Supermarine Spitfire. This excellent film which features William Walton's *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* is gentle and sensitive and very movingly patriotic. In 1943 whilst flying back to London from a secret mission to Lisbon, Howard was killed when his plane was shot down by Nazis raiders who erroneously believed Winston Churchill was on board.

In the final scene in the film Lieutenant Hirth is in a railway freight car and has nearly succeeded in getting across the 49th Parallel into the U.S.A. at Niagra Falls. Also in the freight car is Andy Brock a deserter from the Canadian army played by Raymond Massey. This scene introduces the idea of the importance of free speech in a democracy. Brock grouses and grumbles about the Canadian army. Hirth says "You have a legitimate complaint against your Democratic Government" extremely hypocritically as the slightest dissent against Hitler would have resulted in death or a trip to a concentration camp! Brock answers back "We owe the right to be fed up and say anything about it we damn well please!"

Free speech, debate, dissent, criticism and open access and publishing of the facts and truth, by individuals, groups, the press and media is a cornerstone of open free liberal democracy. In authoritarian police states there is rigid control over these areas and the truth and open debate is replaced by what the state wants you to hear and know only. Anyone who challenges this is put under house arrest, imprisoned or is "disappeared" without trial or as the American put it "without due process". These freedoms are being eroded under our current terrorism scare climate.

The U.S. customs officer although he should technically allow the German officer access into the U.S. due to its neutrality, is unsympathetic towards him and sends him back to Canada using a technical ruse, saying he's not listed on the freight manifest. This last scene shows how the U.S. at that time although officially neutral was sympathetic to the allied cause. Pressburger by using a Canadian deserter may also have subliminally implied that as well as this Canadian needing to report back for duty at his army base the U.S.A. needed to report for duty in this world conflict, i.e. formally and fully declare war against Germany on the allies side.

Landscape as Symbolic Metaphor for Democratic Ideals

The third way the propaganda message is put across although more "covert" implicit and subconscious is probably the most powerful message of all. The Nazis, like the 49th Parallel itself, range across thousands of miles of the huge wide, expansive landscapes of Canada, the Hudson Bay, Prairies and Rocky Mountains. This big broad, wide-open geographical space is used as a symbolic metaphor for big-hearted, arms wide open, liberal democracy where there is "political, socio-economic space and room" for people of all races, religions to live alongside each other in peace, harmony and tolerance. This undercurrent also helps unify the film, an important factor in all artistic endeavours. A range of people in communities and individuals are shown living prosperous, happy lives going about their daily social and work/economic activities without oppressive state control or interference under the secure, strong but free and liberal protecting umbrella of the democratic system. The Nazis pass billowing fields of ripening wheat, also emphasising that this is a land of bounty and prosperity, a land flowing with milk and honey.

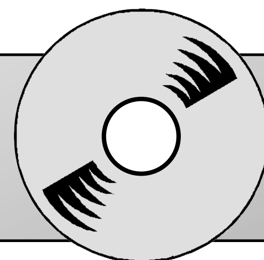
This of course paints a very simplistic utopian, rose-tinted, idealistic picture of the North American situation. Even the most egalitarian, harmonious, democracies have endemic tensions and conflicts, e.g. between classes, Capital and Labour, racial and ethnic minority groups. The history of North America hardly offers a shining paradigm of these ideals, the displacement, conflicts and more or less genocide of the native American Indians in both the U.S. and Canada by the early settlers and colonists was aptly described by a BBC Radio 3 announcer as 'slaughter with hymns'. Also the treatment of Negro slaves and their descendants and other ethnic minority groups although greatly improved is still a major source of tension and controversy to this day.

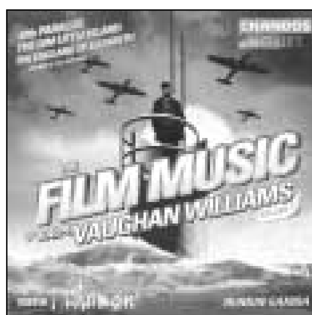
However in relation to the unprecedented bloodbath of brutal horrors and racial genocide that Hitler's Nazi regime was inflicting on the continent the film's stance is justifiable. Arguably the Nazi regime was the most evil regime in human history ruthlessly handing out death and suffering to millions of people on an unspeakable scale and in unspeakable ways. The imperfections and inhumanities of liberal democracies seem small in comparison. Hitler managed to become a one party, tyrannical, totalitarian dictator on the back of socio-economic, political chaos in 1930s Germany, with massive unemployment and inflation exacerbated by the 1930s world depression. With a cunning mixture of manipulation of the then democratic system, popular support for a strong charismatic leader and violent intimidation by his gangs of thugs Hitler managed to get himself into the position of Chancellor of Germany and there he became a dictator bypassing democratic consent and process by conveniently invoking emergency powers in a time of crisis.

At present western liberal democracy is at danger of being a victim of its own success and being taken too much for granted leading to an unhealthy degree of apathy and indifference to political awareness and involvement, the other end of the extreme to fanatically popular or forced by fear involvement in Nazi Germany. The Post War years have brought 60 years of mostly security, peace and material prosperity. This has produced a highly materialistic consumer based culture in society, one of selfish individualism and lack of involvement and connection of large numbers of citizens with community, society and nation. This has led to very low turn outs at elections and can lead to a political vacuum which has allowed the beginning of far right, racist even openly Neo Nazi political groups to gain a significant foothold as has been seen in Britain, France and Austria for example. Often these extreme parties pick up some of the votes of significant minorities, which are not represented by policies aimed at the average majority by mainstream parties. Churchill described democracy as "the least worst system". It can't however be taken for granted. The suffragettes suffered great hardships to obtain the vote for women, and we mustn't ever forget the price paid for freedom in World War II from totalitarian tyranny, paid with Churchill's blood, toil, tears and sweat and the ultimate sacrifice of life itself. It must never be forgotten as once said that "The Price of Freedom is Eternal Vigilance".

Nazi fugitives turn on a Canadian trapper (Olivier)

CD Reviews





The Film Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams Volume 2 *49th Parallel* (Suite edited by Stephen Hogger) *The Dim Little Island* (partially reconstructed by Stephen Hogger) *The England of Elizabeth* (Suite edited by Stephen Hogger) Emily Gray (soprano) / Martin Hindmarsh (tenor) / Chetham's Chamber Choir BBC Philharmonic/Rumon Gamba Chandos CHAN 10244

The new release is the second instalment in Chandos's survey of RVW's film music, part of its refreshing, well packaged and important 'Movies' series. Just as the first exemplary volume delivered a huge swathe of previously unrecorded music to the 'RVW enthusiast who has everything' and succeeded in proving how versatile the old composer was in his new medium (never forget he was almost *seventy* when he wrote his first film score), this one turns up further revelations.

The 'main feature' in this volume is the first - and arguably the most highly regarded - film he wrote for, the Powell and Pressburger hit *49th Parallel* (1940). The two 'shorts' are *The Dim Little Island* (oddly using the definite article in print for the first time), and *The England of Elizabeth*, all propagandist pieces in their different ways.

The Dim Little Island (1949) is a strange little track of seven and a half minutes (the film itself is a mere ten minutes in length), which leans heavily on *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'*, including a sung verse: as such, it is a beautiful piece. But ultimately, it is clearly music arranged to be heard behind commentary, part of which Michael Kennedy usefully reprints in the liner note. Not a caveat that applies to the other soundtracks on this album, incidentally. It would be interesting to catch this rare film one day, if the mists of time ever reveal it again: even the composer himself apparently had no memory whatsoever of working on it only a few years later, despite contributing both music *and* voice!

The England of Elizabeth (1957) is a warm, poetic and lively score current with (and almost as long as) the *8th Symphony*. I might even dare to suggest that it is a more vital work, with highly colourful scoring, rapturous passages (the *Kings College Cambridge* section is lovely), and gloriously exciting climaxes. It is a far superior experience to Muir Mathieson's concert suite, *The Three Portraits* from *The England of Elizabeth* which I remember hearing last on an RCA disc conducted by André Previn. If not actually deeper in 'meaning' than the *8th Symphony*, it is certainly one of its important satellite pieces: astonishing work from a man of eighty-three. A slight gripe (as with *The People's Land* on the first disc) is that such a clearly programmatic work is not banded into smaller sections (almost thirty are named) for quick access, though aurally they are obvious enough.

The *Prelude* from *49th Parallel* has been recorded a couple of times, and various parts of the score found their way into other works, if not actually forming new pieces, such as the song *The New Commonwealth*, based on the *Prelude*. But apart from that, the score has been neglected for more than sixty years, athough the film is available on video and DVD (as *The Invaders* in the US) at least. RVW suppressed a later suite (apparently only performed once, in Prague), and there is much work to be done in explaining the knotty subject of the various performing versions, the compositional method, sketches and performance technique involved - don't forget this was music expressly written to be *recorded*. In this respect, the booklet notes are sparing, leaving the way open for some future scholar. This is fine and entertaining music, and it is good to hear it free of the thin and scratchy confines of the actual soundtrack at last. There are new subtleties to hear, and new comparisons to make: with the *6th Symphony* (but not the 5th), and (like *Scott of the Antarctic*) Holst's *Planets*. Some comparisons must be approached with caution though; part of the Nazis on the run track sounds uncannily like the Epilogue of the *6th Symphony*. But heard on the film soundtrack, it has a different 'meaning' than any yet attached to that movement; and is played almost like a snatch from a Delius Scandinavian work, illustrating as it does a shot of the Nazi fugitives wearily climbing through beautiful mountain scenery.

One reservation I have is in the omission of the piano piece *The Lake in the Mountains*. Why was this? There was still enough space on the disc, and the piece is important in the scheme of things. When the piece was published in 1947, it seemed to be much the same as the music on the soundtrack. Perhaps the film version doesn't pass muster? It's a great shame the piece is missing without explanation. At least we have the recent Hyperion recording to turn to.

Initially I was disappointed with the inauthentic performance of *Anna's Volksleid*, until I realised I'd been wrong footed. Soprano Emily Gray performs the single verse of the folk carol perfectly, but her richness doesn't match the childish vocal of the film character, who is fifteen (Gray is actually eighteen!). But closer inspection of the film itself reveals that the song isn't even sung in the same form. In *RVW*, Ursula remembered the recording session:

….[Glynis Johns] was very young, very frightened of the orchestra, and quite unable to sing it in the key in which it had been written – sing it as you like, said Ralph, and I'll change the key. But it was no good, so eventually George Stratton [leader of the LSO] more or less played it into her ear, and she managed a husky hum, while Muir Mathieson [conductor/musical director] whistled the second verse – and so after a delay of an hour or so the half minute was recorded.

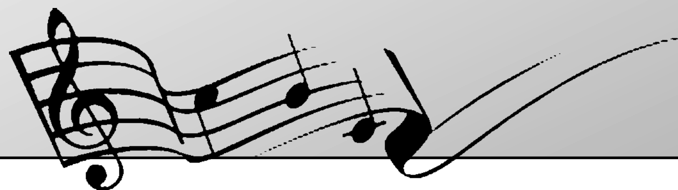
In the completed film, Johns hums the tune for just ten seconds. What is interesting, though, is that Mathieson's whistling seems to have made it into the film too. Later in the same 'Hutterite' section of the film, one of the Nazis is seen making bread (for Anna) in the bakery. His face isn't seen, but he's whistling her tune. All of which means that the performance on this disc is surely the music VW originally intended us to hear. With the sketches in the British Library there is a version of the song for women's voices, too. Was this also intended for the film, or was he merely tinkering about with a nice tune? The idea of a busy composer like VW setting a German folk carol for any other reason during wartime doesn't quite wash. The piece on the disc is a standout moment, anyway.

This disc is a mandatory purchase for anyone even remotely interested in the composer or British film in general. It has been barely out of my player for over a week, such is the tunefulness, diversity and sheer pleasure to be gleaned from it: I can't give it any firmer recommendation than that.

The sound quality is, like the first volume, just as we have now come to expect from Chandos as a matter of course: demonstration level. We can once again congratulate conductor Rumon Gamba and editor Stephen Hogger on their achievements, and eagerly await the third instalment!

Rolf Jordan

Concert Reviews



Folk singing in Suffolk.

In May I went to Walberswick on the Suffolk coast to take part in a folk song workshop. I had never tried folk singing before, but the publicity said that they would be working on songs collected by Vaughan Williams at Southwold in 1910.

It also said that beginners were welcome so I resolved to go. The village hall soon filled up, and we were doing breathing exercises, a few scales, and a couple of rounds to warm up. Our tutor, well-known folk singer, Chris Coe, explained that the most important part of folk song was the story, therefore there were many versions of the same song. Different singers would make subtle changes in rhythm or melody to make the story more effective.

Throughout the morning we learned the song *In London town I was bred and born*. This was one of the songs collected by RVW. We learned it line by line – parrot fashion. In the afternoon we tackled *Forty Miles* another of Vaughan Williams's acquisitions. Later, the BBC, who made recordings of us singing, visited us. In the evening, participants were invited to a local singsong at the Bell Inn. This was like travelling back in time, as local singers stood up to sing endless verses of various songs accompanied by everyone in the choruses.

The workshop was organised by the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust as part of the project "Blythe Valley Voices". Folk songs collected by RVW and George Butterworth were taken to schools and concert halls. Songs used in the project included *Lovely Joan, Georgy, Isle of France, The Cobbler, Princess Royal, The Loss of the London, Jones Ale, Loss of the Royal George*, *Three Jolly Butchers*.

The project was well attended and achieved its aim of bringing alive folk songs collected so many years ago.

Linda Hayward.

A LEEDS *ANTARTICA*

Given the comparative paucity of performances of VW's symphonies by professional orchestras it was heartening to see the amateur Leeds Symphony Orchestra, now in its 113th Season, programming the *Sinfonia Antartica* at its summer concert held in the impressively large and lofty, not to say beautiful, St Chad's Church, Headingley on 16 May. The venue proved near ideal for this work, which, whatever reservations might be had about it in symphonic terms, contains some magnificent music.

The conductor, Martin Binks (whose 200th concert with the orchestra this was), seemed to me to have the measure of the piece, with well-judged tempi. Apart from some occasional insecurities in the strings and in the muted horns in the third movement, the orchestra did the work proud, with splendid contributions from the brass and percussion. The great moment in the third movement when the organ thunders out was truly thrilling. Indeed, here one was especially grateful for the church setting, with plenty of space for the sound to fill out. No doubt there have been more finely shaded performances of the work but overall this was an impressive achievement.

Interestingly, the symphony was played first, before the shorter works, Respighi's *The Fountains of Rome*, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* and Copland's *Four Dance Episodes* from *Rodeo* (an enterprising programme, to say the least). Perhaps it was just as well because when the Copland came round the orchestra had distinct trouble in coping with the composer's diamond-sharp syncopations and what might be termed that distinctively American sassiness.

In response to a presentation made to him to mark the auspicious occasion the conductor recalled that at his very first concert he had included *A London Symphony*. That VW figured in his 200th seemed a particularly 'happy return' therefore.

Michael Nelson

Todmorden Town Hall Concert on 26th June 2004.

This summertime "Prom" by Todmorden Orchestra under Christopher Swaffer celebrated English music in familiar style. I found Elgar's *Bavarian Dances* ponderous, by contrast with *Nimrod* which came later after the overweight percussion had been softened. This concluded the first half. We then enjoyed the popular Bruch *Violin Concerto in G minor*, in which Martyn Jackson (16) made his promising debut as soloist, soon finding his strengths and being exceptionally sweet in tone in the slow movement.

Next came Vaughan Williams's *English Folk Song Suite* in which the players brought out the mastery of our nation's greatest composer who is among the world's top score and perhaps dozen. Delius's *Cuckoo* was dreamy, and the favourite lollipops exuberant – *Jupiter, Jerusalem, Sea Songs* (enhanced by *Conquering Hero* as smuggled in by Wood), and of course *Land of Hope and Glory*. I'm too serious-minded to care for Benson's hackneyed words, and I replaced them by a squib in the wake of England's European Cup downfall.

Land of hope and sorrow,/ Mother of the Game,/ Victory eludes us,/ Ain't it such a shame?/ Forwards' metatarsals,/ Spotkicks from the mud,/ Referees with guide-dogs,/ After England's blood (x 2).

With deep respect to our Elgarian friends, and knowing that pecking-orders are somewhat subjective, and offensive if taken too seriously, I found my preference for RVW as the deeper composer re-confirmed. Elgar was the laureate of the prosperous Edwardians, and only the horror of World War I (*O my horses!*) brought the world's darknesses to the centre of his being, generating his magnificent *Cello Concerto* then silence. RVW is the laureate of all England, grave and gay, rich and poor, comfortable and in tribulation, in doubt and in faith.

I do urge all who read this to look out for, encourage and attend local performances of our Uncle Ralph's works. He was truly a People's Composer, for the now extinct Butcher's Boy who whistled *Greensleeves* whilst he worked in my younger days before the pop-plague, equally as for the King.

Frank R McManus

J.S. Bach, the Wintertide and the Poetics of Translation in Hodie

by Gregory Martin

It almost seems redundant to invoke once more the interest so many musicians have demonstrated in the parallels between music and spoken language. Yet this fascination is certainly persistent enough to merit its many mentions. There are of course those talents who seem able to evince an equal facility in poetry and song (Thomas Campion, Ivor Gurney), and those who elicit an impulse to express intellectual or aesthetic ideas in both tonal and linguistic forums (as is perhaps best exemplified by Robert Schumann). This mutual interest has extended, in some instances, into profound investigations into the nature of the spoken word and its relationship to music: Musorgsky, Janáček, and Ravel devoted much of their musical energies to accurate musical representations of their respective languages, and the unorthodox German syntax in Wagner's libretti is the product of a thorough urgency aimed at finding the deepest cultural resonances of each word.[1]

This common appreciation comes as no surprise when we acknowledge, as Vaughan Williams did, that "music, like language, derives ultimately from its basic beginnings."[2] That is, both are like national identity, constructed from our environment, our experiences with it, and the spiritual vibrations these set alight in our psyche. As Gaston Bachelard observed, "A word is a bud attempting to become a twig ...Words, in their distant past, have the past of my reveries ... the most unexpected rare things hatch out of the word which was sleeping in its inert meaning, like a fossil of meaning."[3] The awareness of such an intimacy between our language and ourselves throws into relief why the debate over translation is so fraught with polemics. Today, many regard the prospect with disdain, contending that when a work or passage is translated from one language to another it is stripped of its virility and left a ghost of its former self; they argue that its essence is rendered weak - or at worst impotent - because its accordant catalogue of associations is missing. But many of the most thoughtful and knowledgeable literary minds of recent history have argued otherwise. Novalis regarded translation as an art equal to creation, because it is "more difficult and more rare. In the end, all literature is translation"[4]; J.R.R. Tolkien not only contributed a wealth of his linguistic and philological insight into his translations of Middle-English verse (perhaps most notably "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and the [forthcoming] edition of *Beowulf*), but in the evening gatherings of the Kolbítar he would do impromptu translations of the Icelandic sagas and Eddas, his readings changing every time[5]; Nabokov's English edition of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* is replete with commentary, and Nabokov spends considerable energy defending his approach to translation in the forward to volume I.[6]

Recently, musical scholarship has picked up on this ideology and begun to relate it to both composers and individual works.[7] Inspired by such applications, I have come to view RVW's Christmas cantata *Hodie* ("This Day") as a venture into translation. While similarities between *Hodie* and the Passions of J.S. Bach, especially as according to St. Matthew, have been noted before,[8] it is the purpose of this essay to propose a reading of the cantata as a formal and aesthetic translation of Bach's compositions from the musical language of Baroque Germany into that of twentieth-century England. Perhaps a more accurate way of looking at it is that *Hodie* is a 'generic transcription' of the Bach Passions not simply a formal duplicate, but an attempt to renew the genre by surrounding it with a new set of connotations, taking into account the mores and values of a new audience and a new generation, one that had just witnessed the two most destructive wars in the earth's history. One must allow that tradition had taken on an even greater pertinence in England during the war years, as the country struggled to maintain a sense of itself, and that its national psyche was afterwards forced to adjust from being the most powerful empire on the planet to a nation whose survival now very much depended on foreign powers. As Simon Schama has observed, "if [post World War II] Britain was to have a distinctive future in the age of superstates, it had better keep faith with the best traditions in its long history."[9] In the wake of such changes, no one was more aware of the importance of the national element in art than Vaughan Williams, as essays such as "National Music" and "Nationalism and Internationalism" attest, and as is exemplified in his own music and in his devotion to the English choral tradition and the preservation of folk-song.

But before we examine exactly how Vaughan Williams translated the Passions for England, it would be beneficial to investigate his thoughts on Bach and his approach to Bach in performance. Part VII of his collection "Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony, With Writings on Other Musical Subjects"[10] focuses on the master from the Thomaskirche, whom Vaughan Williams considered "the greatest composer the world has yet produced."[11] There he states "we must introduce Bach to our musical public not as a museum piece; we must do nothing to give the slightest hint of the scholar or the antiquarian."[12] In support of this stance, he argues for the inclusion of the clarinet in Bach's orchestra (doubling the oboes or trumpets), the use of trumpets and trombones in the same piece/movement, and the occasional re-orchestration of passages based on the capabilities of modern instruments and the sizes of modern ensembles. Later, addressing the issue of continuo, he writes:

> It cannot be made too clear that what we find in the usual pianoforte scores of the Bach recitatives is not what Bach wrote. As I have already said, what Bach wrote for his recitatives was only the bass with the necessary figures to indicate the harmonies. In the usual vocal scores of the Passion this bass is 'realized' as a series of detached chords placed in the dullest part of the instrument and with hardly any variation of treatment which makes the cadences, particularly, almost intolerable . . . How, then, are we to play Bach recitatives? We have some evidence that Bach and the pupils under his guidance did something interesting and elaborate by way of 'realization'. Will it be impertinent if we also try to do something interesting and elaborate, always of course keeping well within Bach's idiom? In this way, I believe we should truly interpret the word 'continuo' by a flowing melodic outline varying according to the nature of the narrative and the emotional content of the words.[13]

Elsewhere, he states that

> the use of the harpsichord or viol da gamba for continuo seems to reduce the *St. John Passion* to a museum piece to be put in a glass case.. . . I have no doubt that if the grand pianoforte of our day had been available to Bach he would have used it in preference to the harpsichord.. . . The same applies to our oboes with their lovely tone, which no one hesitates to use instead of the coarse-sounding oboes of Bach's time: why make an exception of the harpsichord as is now fashionable? . . . I believe it is our privilege and our duty to use all the improved mechanism invented by our instrument makers to do full justice to this immortal work.[14]

Perhaps the two most sensitive topics touched on in his Bach essay are the issue of cuts and the translation of texts. Regarding the former, he admits that "Homer occasionally nods, and some of the arias are not up to Bach's high standard. It is, I believe, wrong to include these for the sake of a mechanical completeness."[15] Hence, his 1958 recording of the St. Matthew Passion omits, among others, numbers 18-20 of Part I and numbers 49-52 of Part II. As for translations, he believed it "to be a sound principle that no singer should sing in any language with which both he and his audience are not familiar."[16] While he maintains that in the arias and ariosos the translations must without exception cater to Bach's original music, he suggests that in recitative passages,

surely we may alter a note or two so as to preserve our superb English Biblical language, though of course, even here, when Bach has a magnificent expressive phrase for a particular word, we must, of course, place that word under the note which expresses it.[17]

The programme notes he wrote for performances of the *Mass in B minor* reassert that it is "worthwhile occasionally to alter a crotchet to two quavers, to re-articulate a tied note or even (occasionally) to add a note, or (very occasionally) to omit one, for the sake of keeping the Prayer Book text unaltered."[18] A final, moving aspect of Vaughan Williams's performances of the Passions is that he would turn to the audience at each chorale, signalling for them to join the chorus in singing.[19] Similarly, he would insist that they stand for the Last Supper Scene.[20] In summary, the most important creed in his approach to Bach, as is reiterated time and again in his writings, is that the spirit of the music should be maintained at any cost, even if it means deviation from the printed score.[21] As he argued, "if we adhere meticulously and mechanically to the letter of Bach we shall inevitably kill the spirit."[22]

With this brief overview of Vaughan Williams's relationship to Bach's music in place, we will initiate our look at how *Hodie* functions as a translation of Bach's models by addressing the most significant difference between the two works: the subject matter. In the Passions, the topic is the Crucifixion of Christ, in Vaughan Williams's piece it is His birth. In its own way, this is the most important aspect of Vaughan Williams's translation, for while Easter and the Lenten season seem to have obtained the greatest responsiveness from Bach (the *Christmas Oratorio* might be fodder for argument), it was Christmas that English composers of the early and mid-twentieth-century held especially dear, and to which they seemed particularly attracted.[23] Vaughan Williams had long wanted to compose a major Christmas work (the *Fantasy on Christmas Carols, On Christmas Night* and other carol settings notwithstanding),[24] and composers like Bax, Britten, Butterworth, Dyson, Elgar, Finzi, Holst, Howells, Ireland, Milford, Rubbra, and Warlock also felt deep personal connections with the season and offered their own contributions. "After all," noted Robin Milford, "there is really very little to fill the gap between carols and the *Christmas Cantata*, isn't there?"[25]

What was it about Christmas that so attracted the school of "cheerful agnostics" - to use Ursula Vaughan Williams's phrase - of which Vaughan Williams was a prime exponent? I put forward that the unique blend of pagan naturalism and Christian symbols surrounding the wintertide created an ideal environment for the visionary mysticism of a Vaughan Williams or Howells or Finzi to create works of great religious power and metaphysical depth. The history of the Christmastide is itself, after all, the story of the integration of Christian belief with pagan festal ritual - most significantly the Kalends of January. In England, the fourth century establishment of 25 December as Christmas seems to have been particularly poignant, as the feast became thus fixed to coincide with the onset of that time of year to which the English imagination has - since the Middle Ages at - least been most attracted. As Peter Akroyd has noted,

> In the writing of the Anglo-Saxons it is always winter...Winter, and darkness, were the prevailing conditions in a land of frost and snow falling...The Anglo-Saxon word "wolcen" means both cloud and sky as if they were synonyms.[26]

He adds that "the persistence of the words for snow and storm through time [are] a true emblem of imaginative continuity."[27] We may find examples of this national proclivity in sources as various as "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" - which opens at King Arthur's Christmas banquet and in which the major events all occur during the winter - or a letter from Gerald Finzi to Vera Somerfield in 1922 that beautifully captures the essence of an English winter - "After all, there is a lot in a sharp frost & a warm fire."[28]

Like Finzi, Vaughan Williams saw Christmas as "a time of silence and quiet, like Bridges's '*A frosty Christmas Eve*, when the stars were shining.'"[29] The cool clarity and implicit solitude of these opening words from Bridges's "*Noel*: Christmas, 1913" are but a singular manifestation of the more general predilection towards the winter and, in communion with it, a broader Nordic tendency. This affect moved musicians as diverse as Vaughan Williams's beloved Sibelius (to whom the *Fifth Symphony* is dedicated) and Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, who believed:

> there are very few people who make contact with it [the North] and emerge entirely unscathed. Something really does happen to most people who go into the North - they become at least aware of the creative opportunity which the physical fact of the country represents and - quite often, I think - come to measure their own work and life against that rather staggering creative possibility: they become, in effect, philosophers.[30]

In addition to this seasonal/geographic propensity, we need make mention of the countryside with which so many of the English composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were so devoutly enamoured. Upon investigating their relationship to nature, one would be hard pressed not to come up with a conclusion analogous to what Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies find in some of Britain's longest - standing inhabitants: "we see among the Celts an interpenetration of religion and landscape in a way which surpasses anything we might find in the late classical world."[31]

But what of the late 19th-century world? The brand of pagan naturalism to which Bowie and Davies allude finds something of a more orthodox cousin in the mysticism of the Roman Catholic Church. This element certainly contributed to Catholicism's attraction amidst the removed practicality of an increasingly industrialized England, and most definitely assisted in the rash of artists that converted during that time (notables include G.K. Chesterton and Cardinal Newman). It would seem that Catholicism offered a poetic, storied, and Romantic alternative to a more mechanized and too-rational world, and its attendant mystery and decidedly Gothic air acted as something of an umbrella under which individuals could express a belief without necessarily being forced to bring that belief into overly pragmatic focus. In other words, the aura and history of the Catholic faith offered something of a sanctuary wherein one could harbor a belief while simultaneously invoking the innate mysticism of the Church to circumvent defining that belief in too practical or precise a fashion. Much of RVW's most personal music, in fact, seems to rest securely within this tradition of religious mysticism - *Flos Campi*, the *Magnificat*, *The Pilgrim's Progress, Sancta Civitas*, the *Ninth Symphony*, and much of *Hodie*. [In a recent Journal article (No. 28, October 2003), Eric Seddon briefly, though convincingly, examined the tradition of Catholic mystic poetry and its role in VW's work.] Religious conversion may also have been a manner of protest or rebellion against the government in the form of the abandonment of the state religion. In any case, it seems blatant to me that the marriage of such a naturalist mysticism and its religious overtones - as Gurney said to Howells of the Malvern hills, "unless that influences you for the whole of your life in tune-making, it is failing in one of its chief essentials"[32] - with the national predisposition for the winter (and its already assimilated catalogue of Christian imagery) made the Christmastide an ideal poetic landscape for this school of "cheerfully agnostic" composers to present some of their most evocative and personal music.

With this proposal now laid out as background, it seems an appropriate time to turn to a more detailed analysis of *Hodie* itself, and investigate how aspects such as form, instrumentation, and text support the notion of generic translation from Bach's example.

Perhaps the most obvious parallel between Vaughan Williams's cantata and the Passions of Bach is their overall form. Each begins with an annunciatory opening, employing the full orchestra and chorus, though *Hodie's* is of an admittedly more joyous heraldry (as is dictated by the change in subject). During these opening bars (and elsewhere in the work), Vaughan Williams employs a mode that acquired increasing significance for him - the so - called 'lydian minor,' a synthesis of the lydian mode and the natural minor (in this case, E-flat--F--G--A-natural--B-flat--C-flat--D-flat--E-flat). The mystic, even religious, power the composer associated with this mode is greater appreciated in the context of other more metaphysical works which utilize it: *Sancta Civitas* (at "Heaven and Earth are full of Thy glory. Glory be to thee, O Lord most high.") and the *Ninth Symphony* (in the last movement, where the abandoned program stated "Introibo ad altarem Dei" - "I come to the altar of God").

After its bold exordium, *Hodie* is, like the Passions, motivated by the interaction of recitatives, ‘arias’, and chorales. As in the Bach examples, Vaughan Williams uses the recitative as the primary vehicle for narrative action (dramatic motion), the ‘aria’ for personal reflection or response, and the chorale for more general commentary (i.e. the manner in which the chorus has been employed in drama since the days of ancient Greece). But while this design certainly owes something of its organization to Bach’s monumental examples, in Vaughan Williams’s hands it is translated into a more English medium. The ‘arias,’ to begin with, are replaced by numbers that are more appropriate for the composer’s time and place. Instead of da capo constructions we find songs, a pastoral, a lullaby.[33] Based on their subject matter and character (frequent use of a pentatonic melodic outline redolent of folk-song,[34] predominant designation of slow tempi, etc.), it is safe to categorize these collectively as carols: the topics pertain to Christmas, as the medieval carol came to be (many of the extant older carols are found in Wynkyn de Word’s 1521 collection Christmasse Carolles), and “Lullaby” (no. XI) refers specifically to the Virgin Mother, another of the major preoccupations of the genre. Michael Kennedy has noted that “specially English overtones” are summoned through “associations with carols from King’s College, Cambridge, and carols from the depths of the Herefordshire countryside (though no folk tunes are used or quoted).”[35] Hence, Vaughan Williams has replaced the German/Central European da capo aria with arguably the most quintessential of the English vocal traditions, and certainly the one most appropriate for the Christmas season.

In the chorales, Vaughan Williams again partially retains Bach’s precedent and partially deviates. Unlike his predecessor’s examples, the chorales in *Hodie* are set to completely original music; however, in the case of no. V, the text is drawn from “Miles Coverdale, after Martin Luther,” maintaining the relationship to Luther at least in part. As with such monumental works as the *Tallis Fantasia* and the *Mass in G Minor*, the style of the chorales owes more to Vaughan Williams’s studies of his Tudor ancestors than to eighteenth-century continental counterpoint. The second chorale (no. 15), for example, is replete with cross-relations, a hallmark of Tudor polyphony:

Ex. 1: Hodie, Choral (n. XV), m. 4

A composer of vast resource, Vaughan Williams was able to fuse his study of 16th-century polyphony with his own very modern harmonic sensibilities, and, in doing so, demonstrate how innately related the Tudor style was to his own idiom, and how thoroughly he had absorbed it into his own language. In the following excerpt, for example, note how the cross-relation between F and F= is used not just linearly, but also harmonically in order to achieve that all-important progression in his music: the chromatic-mediant (in this case a motion from B-flat minor to D-flat minor).[36]

Ex. 2: Hodie, Choral (no. XV), m.9

The recitatives employ two important specifications that depart from Bach’s examples: the use of organ for the obligato continuo and the replacement of a soloist by “a few trebles (preferably boys)” for the narrative. Both are integral parts of the English choral tradition - the boys contributing a sense of innocence or childlike wonder appropriate for the Christmas season[37] - and Vaughan Williams’s decision to use each is testament to his awareness of national heritage.[38] But within this context, Vaughan Williams very deliberately preserves a marked aspect of Bach’s recitative: the symbolic equation of strings with a halo, a sort of orchestral leitmotif that is used to indicate a character’s sanctity. In the *St. Matthew Passion*, whenever Jesus speaks the strings accompany Him; Christ obviously has no speaking role in *Hodie*, but Vaughan Williams picks up on the intervention of angelic messengers in the Gospels texts he sets, and chooses to identify them with the strings.[39] Furthermore, he affords the divine heralds not only a melodic leitmotif but an harmonic one, as well: the angel’s words are always accompanied by the alteration of C major and E-flat minor (again, the chromatic-mediant). The recitative in *Hodie*, then, retains something of the original Bach inspiration while adding elements that reflect not only English tradition (the organ, the boys choir), but also a more contemporary harmonic language (the chromatic mediant from C to E-flat).

The symbolic importance that harmony attains in Vaughan Williams’s language is further illustrated in the finale (“Epilogue”), where it underlies a subtle though multi-level use of quotation (‘cribbing’ in RVW parlance). The closing movement of *Hodie* begins as follows:

Ex. 3: Hodie, Epilogue (no. XVI), mm.1-8

Note the parallel-moving minor chord pairs F-sharp minor/F minor and B minor/B-flat minor. While one could simply dub such harmonic

motions as tendencies innate to Vaughan Williams's musical language (and they'd be right), there seems to be a deeper meaning here. This chord oscillation recalls the use of chromatic harmonic fluctuation as dramatic identifier in the 'morality' *The Pilgrim's Progress,* wherein the Evangelist's text is set to an oscillating E-flat minor/D minor sequence[40]:

Moderato Evangelist

Did I not di - rect thee to the wick-et gate?

Ex. 4: from The Pilgrim's Progress, Act I, Scene I

In the closing movement of *Hodie*, the chords in Ex. 3 are joined by a melody (played in the strings and bassoons at the pickup to m.4; the baritone repeats it in m.6) that is certainly a reference to the "Et incarnatus est" (Credo) from the *Missa Solemnis b*y Beethoven. Vaughan Williams's familiarity with this passage is attested by a reference he made some thirty-five years earlier - through the layering of vocal entries, the same Beethoven passage is suggested in his own mass, at the same text![41]

Baritone solo pp

In the be - gin-ning was the Word

Tpts. Tbns.

Ex. 5a: Beethoven, Missa Solemnis: Credo, mm.126-9

Lento Alto solo

Et in - car - na - tus est

Tenor solo

Et in - car - na - tus est

Ex. 5b: Vaughan Williams, Mass in G minor: Credo, mm.70-2

This melody, then, acts as a reference on two planes (to Beethoven and to Vaughan Williams himself), and it seems safe to say, given the above comparison of the two Credo excerpts, that Vaughan Williams associated it with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Where better to employ such a musical association than in a work celebrating this very event? Given the use of the chromatic minor alteration in *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a leitmotif of the Evangelist, and keeping in mind the importance this work held for RVW through so much of his adult life, I suggest that it is here referenced for a deeper narrative element. The music of the Evangelist - in this case we may interpret this to be the music of John the Baptist - lays the harmonic foundation for the *Et incarnatus est* music. The first eight bars of the Epilogue, then, act as a sort of musical storytelling of John's preparation for the arrival of the Word Incarnate.

The form of the Epilogue as a whole is a concluding homage to the *St. Matthew Passion*. In Bach's piece, the final number begins with a recitative in which each of the four soloists, entering in order of ascending range (bass, tenor, alto, soprano), sings a final phrase before the choirs enter for the peroration. Vaughan Williams likewise gives each of his soloists his/her turn (also in ascending order - baritone, tenor, soprano) before the chorus enters to conclude the cantata. *Hodie's* finale, then, is a last recognition of the debt owed to the Bach Passions in terms of formal design.

In our look at how attributes of translation are styled in the example of *Hodie*, we would of course be remiss if we failed to mention language in its more traditional sense. As might be expected, most of the texts employed in *Hodie* are in English - indeed, all of them less the first movement. This occasion is, however, exceptional, as its source is the Vespers for Christmas Day, and one can sympathize with even such a musical populist as Vaughan Williams when he chooses to retain the original Latin in this instance (the text for this office is so established and carries such a mien of majesty and antiquity that it could be perceived as a sort of blasphemy, or at least a gallant display of bad taste, to render it in English).[42] This is the same reason why he used the traditional Latin text in his Mass in G Minor. The concern at present, however, is the use of English for the remainder of the text, for herein we find a translation of the spirit of Bach, which, as we have seen, was Vaughan Williams's primary concern in the performance of his idol. In the Passions, to say nothing of the vast volumes of cantatas, Bach's texts are in German, the language of the people for whom he was writing and who were attending the vernacular religious services in which his music was performed. Likewise, Vaughan Williams's use of English words is an immediate attempt to communicate with his countrymen in their native tongue. But when we examine the broad spectrum of those words, we countenance a manner in which the chosen texts act as translation on a more ontological level.

Unlike Bach's use of a single librettist in the *St. Matthew Passion* (Picander), Vaughan Williams compiled his texts from among the most important figures in the English literary tradition since Shakespeare (in this way it is closer to the Passion according to St. John). While the styles move from the post-Elizabethan of Milton to the more stark esoterica of Hardy ("In the lonely barton by yonder coomb"), the text retains a sense of unity through the elaborate and consistent use of the most fundamental Christmas symbols – the manger and its occupants, the shepherds, the Virgin. Our general familiarity with the Christmas story and its characters can't help but soften many of the rough edges that may remain, and the concluding epilogue to words from Milton's "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity" acts as a glorious apotheosis to the tale. By compiling a veritable pantheon of English authors, Vaughan Williams was appealing not only to his audience's background or their learning, but also to their culture and environment, and to what is most certainly the nation's greatest artistic achievement: its literature. In doing so, he placed a decidedly Continental form - the cantata - into more familiar English territory.[43]

Of course this practice of anthologizing texts from various sources for multi-movement works is not remotely unique in English music, but in *Hodie* it affords us a most profound manifestation of translation. By using texts that typify the most powerful and versatile of English writers - from the high Jacobean of the King James Bible to the Wessex dialects of Hardy - Vaughan Williams places the Christmas story in a peculiarly English climate. The flow of the words, their syntax and construction, their deliberate placement and the resonances of the language with nationalism or 'Englishness' move the story they are telling into a setting commensurate with their culture.[44] They shift the birth of Christ from Judea to Gloucester or Newcastle or the Salisbury Plain. [Finzi's masterful Christmas scene *In terra pax*, in which Robert Bridges's "Noel: Christmas, 1913" is set with the third verse replaced by the same famous

passage from Luke's Gospel employed by Vaughan Williams (no. VI), likewise effects a transplanting of the Nativity scene from Bethlehem to the English countryside.] Hearing the Christmas story told in a manner that is so immediate, in a language identified so closely with England both musically (the boys choir, the use of carols, Tudor polyphony, etc.) and with respect to the written word makes the story incalculably more local and, consequently, more accessible to the audience for which Vaughan Williams was writing.

This technique of transplanting Biblical scenes to England we may place in a larger national tradition, one perhaps most famously illustrated in the popular excerpt from Blake's "Milton,"

> And did those feet in ancient time
> Walk upon England's mountains green?
> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen?

In the earliest Anglo-Saxon Biblical translations - Genesis or Exodus, for example - not only do the events unfold in the winter (see the above discussion on winter and the English psyche):

> How shall we now survive or exist in this land if wind comes here from west or east, south or north? Dark cloud will loom up, a hailstorm will come pelting from the sky and frost will set in along with it, which will be wickedly cold...[Genesis][45]

but they are transplanted to England and played out with an English character. As Akroyd puts it, "Adam is awakened from his dream of bliss to find himself, fallen, in England."[46] This tradition is also demonstrated in the writings of the CFdmon school:

> our old English poet [CFdmon] drew his scenery from that which was best known to him and best understood by those to whom he sang...his Deity is his Northumbrian chief, his Satan and rebel angels, the pretenders to the throne, and the strife in heaven, such as he had himself assisted in.[47]

I would contend this tradition to be intimately connected with the belief that Christ visited the British Isles (and France) after the Resurrection. More immediately, however, the tradition of moving Biblical scenes to the local landscape serves to make them more accessible to the local people. Vaughan Williams contributes to this national tradition not only through his inclusion of texts in this vein - Milton's hymn proper begins "It was the winter wild" and later employs such images as "hide her guilty front with innocent snow" (VW did not set this line) - but also, by way of Bach's examples, by presenting a vision of the Christmas scene in distinctively English tones.

Hodie, then, stands as a translation of the Bach Passions in cultural heritage, form, language, instrumentation, and overall musical grammar (no one would mistake the song "It was the Winter Wild" for a seventeenth-century German composition). Most importantly, however, it triumphs as a translation of what Vaughan Williams viewed as the most fundamental principle of Bach's music: "the spirit giveth life."[48] The spirit of Bach's compositions is preserved and translated to serve the temperament and aesthetics of another land, one where, like Tolkien, we may say that Ralph Vaughan Williams imagined a music "cool and clear . . . redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East) . . . while possessing . . . the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic . . . fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry."[49]

Vaughan Williams believed that in order to be universal, one must first be national. "The greatest artist," he wrote, "belongs inevitably to his country as much as the humblest singer in a remote village,"[50] adding that if a work of art deserves to be called universal, it is "universal because it is so intensely national."[51] Forty years after his death, Sir Roger Norrington justified his plan to record the cycle of Vaughan Williams symphonies:

> I want to portray a major international figure of twentieth-century music. I want to hear a marvellously individual composer, who just happened to be English: a composer who chose his tonalities as freely as Debussy and Ravel, his unique rhythms as deftly as Stravinsky and Bartók. I want to celebrate a master who may have worn tweed and enjoyed cream buns . . . but whose soul was ablaze with glory, pity and anger. I want to do honour to a man whose sense of social duty made him seek to write music for everybody.[52]

Certainly, as we find ourselves in the graces of a new millennium, we can see a final parallel between the Passions and *Hodie*, or rather between their composers, one from which Vaughan Williams would most definitely have shied away, but one becoming ever more insistent nonetheless: that in believing in the priority of the national, the local, Whitman's 'Divine Average' from which the composer believed "nearly all that is worth while in religion, painting, poetry, and music has sprung"[53] and working so assiduously for its cause, Vaughan Williams has, like his hero, become universal.

Endnotes:

1. Tantamount to this is the drive by many composers in the wake of national realization to create a music that reflects the personality of a people; for example, the musical language developed by Grieg was one more reticent than the predominant German music of the time because, as he claimed, "we [Norwegians] do not share their [Germans] desire to express themselves broadly and verbosely. To the contrary. We have always loved brevity and succinctness, the clear and concise mode of expression– just as you can find it in our sagas, and as any traveller could observe even today in our social intercourse." (From "French and German Music," reprinted in Finn Benestad and Williams H. Halverson, *Edvard Grieg: Diaries, Articles, Speeches* (Columbus: Peer Gynt Press, 2001), 352.

2. Ralph Vaughan Williams, "The Folk-song Movement" reprinted in Ralph Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 235.

3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos* trans. by Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 17-8. Bachelard adds that for the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, "research into the etymology of words is a substitute for infantile questions on the origin of children (18, note 12)" and quotes Alain Bosquet: "At the bottom of each word/I'm a spectator at my birth (27)."

4. Novalis, quoted in James Garratt ("Mendelssohn's Babel: Romanticism and the Poetics of Translation," *Music and Letters*, vol. 80 no. 1, p. 23-49). Quoting Wilhelm von Humboldt, Garratt continues by adding that the Romantics "saw one of the primary purposes of translation as being 'to increase the significance and the expressiveness of one's own language (46).'"

5. The edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* done with E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press) was published in 1925; a later, solo effort was printed posthumously under the direction of his son Christopher (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980). The Kolbítar, or Coalbiters, was a group of Oxford dons–including C. S. Lewis–that acted as a forerunner to the Inklings. Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000), 125-6.

6. If Onegin stands as a rather quintessential Byronic Hero, it should be noted that Pushkin first read the poetry of Lord Byron (a vital early influence) in translation.

7. An excellent application of translation theory is James Garratt's article "Mendelssohn's Babel: Romanticism and the Poetics of Translation" (*Music and Letters*, vol. 80 no. 1, p. 23-49), wherein he argues that Mendelssohn's use of musical techniques from the past (especially those of Palestrina and Bach) were a musical translation of those devices across the centuries, making their language accessible to nineteenth-century Germany. Mendelssohn proves an especially good choice not only with respect to his music, but also given his own efforts in poetic translation (see Monika Hennemann, "Mendelssohn and Byron: Two Songs Almost Without Words" in *Mendelssohn-Studien*, vol. 10 1997 p. 131-56).

8. See, for example, Marjorie Monroe-Fischer, "Hodie and the Bach Passions" (*Journal of the RVW Society* no. 18 June 2000, 6) and Michael Kennedy (notes to David Willcocks's recording on EMI 5 67427 2).

9. Simon Schama, *A History of Britain*, Episode XV ("The Two Winstons"), BBC/The History Channel, 2002.

10. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Bach, the Great Bourgeois,'part VII of "Some Thoughts on Beethoven's Choral Symphony, With Writings on Other Musical Subjects," reprinted in *National Music*, 170-6.

11. Ralph Vaughan Williams, "Harpsichord or Piano? (A Word to Purists)" in *National Music*, 304.

12. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 171.

13. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 175.

14. Vaughan Williams, "Harpsichord or Piano?," 303-4.

15. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 176.

16. Vaughan Williams, quoted in Monroe-Fischer, 6.

17. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 4.

18. Vaughan Williams quoted in Michael Kennedy, "R.V.W. & J.S.B." in the *Journal of the RVW Society* no. 18 June 2000, 4.

19. Kennedy, 4.

20. Jerrold Northrop Moore, liner notes to *Bach St, Matthew Passion, the Leith Hill Festival Performance of 1958 conducted by Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Pearl Records, GEMS 0079).

21. This was a concern of his that was not limited to Bach–see his essay "The Letter and the Spirit" in *National Music*, 121-8.

22. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 175.

23. Peter Akroyd notes that there is a broader English tendency towards Christmas: "The manuals of prayer consistently invoke the Incarnation rather than the Passion ... In the images of Spain and Italy the Holy Virgin is seen as a figure in tears; in England she is characteristically represented as the loving mother of the divine babe." Peter Akroyd, *Albion, The Origins of the English Imagination* (New York: Nan A. Talese, Doubleday, 2002), 134.

24. *The First Nowell* was not written until 1958.

25. Robin Milford, quoted in Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi*: *An English Composer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), 455.

26. Akroyd, 78-80.

27. Ibid., 79.

28. Finzi, quoted in Banfield, 119.

29. Finzi, quoted in Banfield, 96.

30. Glenn Gould, "'The Idea of North': An Introduction" in *The Glenn Gould Reader* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 392.

31. Fiona Bowie and Oliver Davies, *Celtic Christian Spirituality* (*An Anthology of Medieval and Modern Sources*) (London: SPCK, 1995), 6, recent speculation on the historical legitimacy of the term "Celticism" notwithstanding.

32. Quoted in Paul Spicer, *Herbert Howells* (Bridgend, Wales: Seren, 1998), 20.

33. The use of the title 'Pastoral' for George Herbert's poem "Christmas" may have a predecessor in the pastoral symphony from Handel's *Messiah*; in any case, it carries far different connotations here than in the desolate Third Symphony.

34. I believe that Vaughan Williams's study of folk-song was intimately related to his harmonic thought, which is arguably the most individual single quality in his music. This is borne out by a quick comparison with a composer influential on Vaughan Williams's musical development: Edvard Grieg. Grieg wrote: "The kingdom of harmony was always my dream world, and my harmonic way of feeling was always a mystery to myself. I have found that the obscure depth in our folk music results from its unguessed harmonic possibilities. In my treatment of folk melodies . . . I have tried to give expression to my guess at the hidden harmonies of our folk tunes (quoted in David Monrad-Johansen, *Edvard Grieg* trans. by Madge Robertson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938), 350." Writing of the English folk movement in England, Vaughan Williams stated: "we were dazzled, we wanted to preach a new gospel, we wanted to rhapsodize on these tunes just as . . . Grieg had done ("National Music," 46)," and at the age of eighty-two, he said in a lecture at Cornell University: "We young musicians were intoxicated by these tunes [i.e., folk-songs]. We said to ourselves, 'Here are beautiful melodies of which, until lately, we knew nothing. We must emulate Grieg and Smetana, and build up, on the basis of these tunes, a corpus of compositions arising out of our own country and character ("The Folk-Song Movement" reprinted in *National Music*, 235).'" Vaughan Williams's recognition that folk-song is "pure melody without an harmonic substructure," though capable of suggesting to composers "all sorts of harmonic implications ("National Music," 25 6)," meant that he, like Grieg, had imagined new and daring chordal structures to support these native tunes.

35. Kennedy, EMI notes, 4.

36. The chromatic mediant motion was a progression for which Vaughan Williams had a strong propensity, and one which had profound spiritual associations for him (one need look no further than the opening bars of the magnificent *Sea Symphony* for further example).

37. Thanks to Tim Arena for some good discussions on this topic.

38. The use of a textless chorus is another procedure Vaughan Williams incorporates in the score (his greatest achievement in this application is in the viola suite *Flos Campi*), and the sound of the women's chorus against the soprano soloist in no. 3 is quite breathtaking.

39. It is interesting to note that in setting the same passage from St. Luke's Gospel, Vaughan Williams and Finzi approached the character of the angel in a fundamentally different way. That is, Vaughan Williams's angel is a tenor wrapped in a blanket of mystical sound, and Finzi's is a soprano whose entrance is a calming voice, an ideal manifestation of Bridges's "Angels' song comforting/As the comfort of Christ." Vaughan Williams draws from the Gothic mysteries of the Catholic Church, while Finzi leans towards a more personal or human representation.

40. This device is also used in the *Song of Thanksgiving*.

41. In "A Musical Autobiography," Vaughan Williams acknowledges similar debts to Beethoven, citing other instances of musical borrowing: "I have never had any conscience about cribbing. I cribbed Satan's dance in *Job* deliberately from the Scherzo of Beethoven's last quartet; the opening of my F minor Symphony deliberately from the finale of the Ninth Symphony, and the last two bars of the Scherzo to my Sea Symphony from the Mass in D (reprinted in *National Music*, 190)."

42. It should be noted, however, that Vaughan Williams provides an English translation, adding that "The English words may be sung at the discretion of the conductor, but the composer would much prefer the Latin." Such a clause surely stems from his experience with amateur choirs and his intent to express that his compositions were meant not only for professional musicians (this says something of the flexibility of his music).

43. This territory had, of course, been in part prepared for him by the labors of two earlier Germans–Handel and Mendelssohn.

44. It should be noted, as was briefly alluded at the beginning of this essay, that among the initial and most important steps in the national movements of Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a people's acceptance of and association with a linguistic identity, often as conveyed in the form of a great national epic. See, for example, Miroslav Hroch, *The Social Interpretation of Linguistic Demands in European National Movements* (Florence: European University Institute, EUI Working Paper EUF no. 94/1), or his more thorough examination *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

45. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, translated and edited by S.A.J. Bradley (London: Dent and Sons, 1982), 34.

46. Akroyd, 78.

47. Robert Spence Watson, *CFdmon, the First English Poet* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875), 65, 42.

48. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 175.

49. J. R. R. Tolkien, speaking of his desire to create a body of mythology that he "could dedicate simply: to England; to my country." Letter 131 in *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 144-5.

50. "National Music," 7.

51. Ibid., 72-3.

52. Roger Norrington quoted in William Hedley, "Glory, Pity and Anger: British conductors in the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams" (*Journal of the RVW Society*, no. 24 June 2002), 6.

53. Vaughan Williams, "Bach," 176.

Last Chance to Book

Tenth Annual General Meeting
A Special Celebration

To mark the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the RVW Society, this year's AGM will include a celebrity concert, as well as a keynote address from Michael Kennedy. The venue will be the Royal College of Music (Recital Hall) London on Sunday 10 October 2004, commencing at 2.30 pm. Refreshments will be provided before and after the event.

Stephen Varcoe (baritone) and Julius Drake (piano) will perform the following programme:

Three songs from *The House of Life*:

Heart's Haven
Silent Noon
Love-Sight

Three English folk songs:

Bushes and Briars
The Captain's Apprentice
On board a '98

Songs of Travel

Given the special nature of this event, admittance will be by ticket priced at £10 for RVW Society members, including wine and refreshments.

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Mrs Cynthia Cooper, 4 Springfield Road, Aldeburgh. IP15 5JG, Suffolk

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All members are urged to attend this celebration of our tenth anniversary

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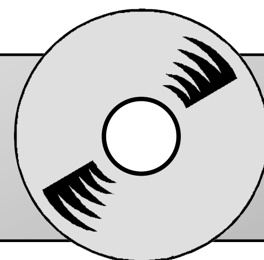

American Composers

By Colin Lees

In this article I'd like to draw readers' attention to works by some American composers – symphonists mostly - whose music is relatively unknown in their own country, let alone in the UK. Little by little, thanks to record labels like Delos, Albany, Koch and Naxos, this music is becoming available on CD, and much of it, I'm sure, will appeal to those who love RVW's music.

I'd be very hard pressed to prove it, but I feel sure that a number of American composers were directly influenced by Vaughan Williams. For example, the early symphonies of Peter Mennin contain passages which recall VW's *F Minor Symphony*. Mennin's *3rd* and *5th Symphonies* (1947 and 1950 respectively) are terse, tense pieces, vigorously argued and charged with emotions similar to those that seem to have gripped Vaughan Williams when he penned his 1934 masterpiece.

Like VW, David Diamond composed well into his eighties, and as far as I know he is still living and writing. His symphonies are - or have been - available on Delos under Gerard Schwarz, and some of these recordings are now being re-released at bargain price by Naxos. Outstanding among them is the magisterial three movement *Fourth Symphony* (1945). Stylistically it does not resemble Vaughan Williams at all, but it does share the dignity and integrity of utterance which we associate with the English composer.

Henry Cowell is well known as one of the 'bad boys' of American music. In the 1920s and 30s he experimented with a range of avant-garde composing techniques, including 'tone-clusters' and messing about with the internal workings of grand pianos. John Cage numbered Cowell among his major influences, and Cowell's reputation today is as an avant-garde innovator, experimenter and teacher. But there is more to him than that. He suffered a traumatic experience in the late 1930s when he was convicted of homosexual offences. Details of exactly what happened are unclear, but the result was that Cowell spent several years in San Quentin gaol. On his release, he seemed eager to draw a line under his avant-garde past. He married a folk-song collector, became Percy Grainger's PA for a time, and began to develop an enthusiasm for traditional American music. He was also interested in the 'hymn and fuguing tunes' of the 18th century American composer, William Billings, a leading member of a group of mostly self-taught musicians who later became known as the First New England School.

Cowell began work on a series of Billings-inspired pieces, each called Hymn and Fuguing Tune – "something slow followed by something fast" - as Cowell himself described them. These short works were written in a modal, pentatonic style which recalls RVW's. This is not surprising since, like Vaughan Williams, Cowell took his inspiration from the musical heritage of his native land, and that tradition had its roots in the British Isles. Hymn and Fuguing Tune Number 2 for strings is a deeply felt work and anyone who admires RVW will respond to its dignity and nobility. Numbers 5 and 8 are also for strings and no less effective than Number 2. Hymn and Fuguing Tune number 10 is a beautiful mini concerto for oboe and strings - a first cousin of VW's *Oboe Concerto*. From 1939 Cowell also embarked on a series of symphonies and wrote no fewer than twenty-one works in this form. *Symphonies 4 and 7* (1946 and 47) are particularly impressive, and powerfully influenced by folk idioms. I tracked them down some years ago, on rare LPs made in the 1960s, and my old recording of number 7 is now available, digitally re-mastered, on CD.

Lou Harrison, who died recently, was a friend of Cowell's. I will not pretend to know much of his music but his Third Symphony (1982) was a major discovery for me in the late '90s. This is a remarkable and very accessible piece in six movements: an extended allegro followed by three linked dance movements (including a jig in memory of Cowell), a long slow movement and a rousing finale. Full of memorable tunes, rhythmic variety and highly original orchestration, it is easy to recommend this fine piece.

Many society members will have come across the music of Alan Hovhaness, who also died recently. I once heard his music dismissed as 'modal doodling' and, for me, much of his output does seem formless, aimless and ultimately rather enervating. He wrote more than forty orchestral works which he called symphonies, though none of them meets the traditional definition of the term. However, his three movement second symphony, *Mysterious Mountain*, is a lovely work, rising well above Hovhaness's usual level of inspiration. It has a most beautiful fugal middle movement and there are distinct echoes of the *Tallis Fantasia* in the final movement. Symphony Number 22, *City of Light,* is also a very fine work and has a magnificent finale based on a plangent hymn-like tune – very stirring stuff indeed. Like Diamond's work, Hovhaness's music was championed in the 1990s by Gerard Schwarz on the Delos label, and some of these recordings are now being re-issued by Naxos.

One real oddity is a piece by Thomas Canning called *Fantasia on a Hymn Tune by Justin Morgan*. I have done my very best to find out more about Canning, but he is not mentioned in Grove, nor does he merit a mention in any of the reference books I have consulted. Searches on the internet merely lead you to Amazon.com where you can buy one of three available recordings of the work! But if you don't already know it, trust me, it's a little gem! Canning has obviously taken the *Tallis Fantasia* as his model, and in doing so has produced a work of great beauty. Amanda, the tune which inspired the *Fantasia*, was written by Justin Morgan, a contemporary of William Billings and another of the 'First New England School' mentioned earlier. Canning uses this simple but lovely tune just as VW used Tallis's melody.

After a slow introduction, Amanda is played through twice, first dispassionately and then with much more ardour. The ensuing fantasia develops and transforms the melody until a passionate climax is reached after which Amanda is presented once more and the music dies serenely away. If the piece was intended as a homage to RVW, it is a very touching and effective one, and I often wonder if Vaughan Williams ever heard it or even knew of its existence. (Incidentally, the composers of the First New England School produced a great deal of delightful music, beautifully performed on CDs by Paul Hillier and His Majesties Clerkes, two of which I have included in the discography at the end of this article – well worth investigating.)

My last bit of Americana is an extremely recent discovery. The Symphony in A minor, *The Virginian*, by John Powell was released by Albany records only a few months ago. Like Vaughan Williams, Powell was an energetic folk-song collector and, also like RVW, he started a music festival in which amateur musicians played a vital part. Unlike VW, his output was very small, he was a gifted concert pianist and he held white-supremacist views which would have horrified his English contemporary. The symphony, based on songs from Powell's collection, is a late work, written in 1946 and revised in 1951. The first movement is lively and has a distinctly out-door feeling. Jaunty folksongs appear, disappear and reappear in a very beguiling way, and very reminiscent of

RVW. The second movement is a gentle meditation on several folksongs, with beautiful writing for solo instruments - I was reminded of the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* here. The third movement, also rather slow, is based on a particularly fine melody (I thought of Grainger here, rather than VW) but after a very powerful opening the movement drifts a little and goes on a bit too long. The finale represents a return to form, however, full of exhilarating, dance-like tunes and an emphatic conclusion.

I very much hope that readers will investigate some of the music I've mentioned in this article. I am confident that any admirer of Vaughan Williams would find much to enjoy in these works. I'll finish with a discography which I hope society members will find helpful. I am not sure that all the discs listed are still available, but a quick search at Amazon.com should help to confirm availability. (Since this music is American, the dot-com version of Amazon is better stocked with this repertoire than the dot-co.uk site.) Happy exploring!

colin.clara@ntlworld.com

Composer	Work	Recording
Mennin, Peter	Symphony 5	
	Mercury 432 755-2	
	Symphonies 3 & 7	Delos DE3164
Diamond, David	Symphonies 2 & 4	Delos DE3093
	Symphony 4 (with Harris / Thompson)	Sony 60594
Cowell, Henry	Hymn and Fuguing Tune # 2, 5, 8 and 10	CPO999 222-2
	Hymn and Fuguing Tune # 9	Koch 3-7205-2H1
	Symphonies 7 & 16 Icelandic	CRI CD 740
Harrison, Lou	Symphony 3	Music Masters 7073-2-C
Hovhaness, Alan	Symphony 2 Mysterious Mountain	Delos DE3157
	Symphony 22 City of Light	Naxos American Classics
Billings, William	"A Land of Pure Delight"	HMU 907048
Morgan, Justin (et al)	"Ghoostly Psalmes" (includes Amanda)	HMU 907128
Canning, Thomas	The Morgan Fantasia appears on three compilations:	
	"American Adagios"	Telarc 80503
	"American Dreams"	Decca 458157
	"Into the Light"	Telarc 80462
Powell, John	Symphony in A Minor Virginian	Albany TROY589

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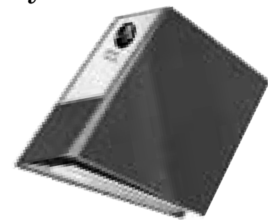

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Crossword Solutions:

Across:

1. Leith Hill Place, 6. Clink, 8. Poison, 10. Ear, 11. Robin, 13. Balcon, 14. Female, 15. Hodie, 17. Fen, 19. Browne, 21. No sad, 22. Josiah Wedgwood

Down:

1. Lionel Benson, 2. Trip, 3. Holi, 4. Lulu, 5. Four, 7. Kathleen Wood, 9. Oxford, 12. Bredon, 16. Earl, 17. Saki, 20. Ward, 21. E N S W

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

Carlton TV

I read Rob Furneaux's article about Carlton TV's policy of not giving credit to the composers of music used in their programmes with much surprise and virtual disbelief.

About a year ago I gave a talk to some elderly Gloucester residents on the subject of RVW and his music and, in opening my talk, mentioned that *The Wasps* was the very first piece of classical music I can recall having heard to "bookend" a BBC radio dramatisation of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, probably in 1945/6. I mentioned that it would be several years before I discovered the name of the music and its composer due to the BBC/Lord Reith policy of not giving credits. I added that such a policy would hardly apply in this day and age so imagine my surprise when I discovered that Carlton apparently still operate a policy not much different from "Aunty BBC" some sixty years ago. I can recall the frustration as a twelve-year-old of not knowing what music I had been listening to week by week on the radio. Presumably, youngsters today face the same problem when watching a Carlton programme though fortunately, with so much RVW music played on the radio channels these days, I trust that they would not have to wait quite as long as I did to discover the title and composer.

I am copying this letter to Carlton TV in the fond hope that they will bring themselves into the 21st century. From what Rob Furneaux has said, I am not too hopeful.

Reg Hargrave

Is it a joke?

Re letter from David Manning on page 27 of the June issue – "Understanding RVW's Music". I cannot understand a single word of it – what is he trying to say? Such obscure writing is hardly likely to enable non-musicians such as myself to "understand" music of any kind. Why not just enjoy rather than analyse it? Analysis destroys the magic. I'm glad I don't have to mark Mr Manning's thesis! I'd give him nil points!

I write this letter because I feel such abstruseness should be pointed out. Is it arrogance, or was it intended as a joke?

Sally Dewhirst

Teaching *Hugh the Drover* in Japan

Members of the RVW Society may be interested to read about my experience of teaching *Hugh the Drover* in a Japanese classroom. I am an English literature teacher, let me immediately premise, not a music teacher. But now that "English Literature" is drifting towards "Cultural Studies" in all sorts of ways, I had no scruples about putting together a class on "Music Theatre in England" for English literature students at Doshisha University in Kyoto. My original idea was to concentrate on "serious" opera, but a little consideration of the English tradition soon convinced me that this was a misguided approach. Are *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Duenna* "serious" works, after all? A case could be made either way, perhaps, but there is surely no doubt that they were the defining works of English music theatre in the 1700s. I decided, therefore, to look at "representative" works, and deliberately mixed serious music drama with more popular forms of music theatre. *Hugh the Drover* was consequently studied between Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* and Noël Coward's *Bitter-Sweet*. I suspect, though I cannot prove, that it was the first time *Hugh the Drover* had been taught in Japan, at least outside of music colleges.

Of all the twenty-three works included in the course, which commenced with William Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes* (1656) and ended with *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Hugh* presented perhaps the least compelling reasons for inclusion. But as a Vaughan Williams enthusiast I wanted to include it, and I justified this, to myself and to my students, by representing it as a British attempt at a kind of opera which had proved very popular elsewhere, particularly in Eastern Europe. We thus approached it, following Vaughan Williams's own pointer, via *The Bartered Bride*.

Hugh was, I regret to report, not one of the students' favourite works — indeed in the end-of-course review they put it quite low on their list. They plainly thought the story was silly, awkwardly mixing realistic elements with fantastic idealization. The students, all of them girls, unanimously said that they would not be interested in taking up Hugh's invitation to become "a bride with courage to go roving," though the following week, when we studied *Bitter-Sweet*, several of them claimed they would follow "the call of life" to elope with a Bohemian musician. (They also thought, surely rightly, that the words of *Bitter-Sweet* are far superior to those of *Hugh*.) They didn't feel that Mary was a well developed character.

Of the purely musical aspects of *Hugh* they were more appreciative. They thought the music just about as good as Smetana's (and they enjoyed the latter a lot). On the other hand, when I offered them a comparison between Vaughan Williams's opening fair scene and the Shrovetide scene in Alexander Serov's *The Power of the Fiend* (Vrazh'ia sila) of 1871 they all preferred the Serov. This preference I could not dispute: Russian composers seem to produce this sort of scene so naturally; Vaughan Williams's, despite a certain robust charm, has a "manufactured" quality which to me at least is well below the standard of the more lyrical parts of the opera. (Serov's little-known opera is discussed enthusiastically and at length in Richard Taruskin's splendid book *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s*, incidentally — what a shame that there's no comparable book on British opera of the late 1800s and early 1900s.)

Teaching usually becomes a learning experience. I certainly felt that I learnt something about *Hugh* from teaching it. It is dramatically weak, though I had not really felt that previously, albeit that the "big" fight scene always seemed a bit disappointing. I became a Vaughan Williams devotee when an undergraduate myself, and it was mainly through the songs. I was a keen backpacker, and the *Songs of Travel* and *On Wenlock Edge* in particular had a special appeal - one which has lasted, and which I still strongly associate with my own tramps through the meadows and byways of rural England, often with a Vaughan Williams tune in my head. *Hugh* is, I suppose, a "Song of Travel" writ large, and as such touches something deep in me. But my chic young Japanese students have almost no knowledge of rural England and don't know much of backpacking or campfires. They approached *Hugh* more straightforwardly, perhaps more objectively, as a romantic story. As such they found it inferior to, say, Balfe's *Bohemian Girl* (a general favourite).

I'm repeating the "Music Theatre" course this year, but have made some changes to it, and have reluctantly decided to omit *Hugh the Drover*. I'm replacing it with Ethyl Smyth's *The Wreckers*, having decided that there should be at least one work by a female composer represented, especially given the fact that, once again, all the students who elected to take the course are girls. Smyth's opera may, in musical terms, fall short of Vaughan Williams's (though it has some superb passages), but it scores higher in terms of dramatic power and psychological interest. I anticipate that it will prove more popular with the Japanese students.

David Chandler
Doshisha University

RVW photograph

I am amused to think that the picture of RVW accompanying the letter from Keith Douglas in the RVW Society Journal, no. 30, June 2004, should have survived the editorial process without being identified.

It is part of a photograph of RVW and Sir Adrian Boult taken in 1949 at the wedding of Sir Adrian's stepdaughter Margaret Wilson, and is similar (but not quite identical) to one reproduced on page 74 of *Ralph Vaughan*

Williams: a Pictorial Biography by John E. Lunn and Ursula Vaughan Williams (Oxford, 1971) - with Boult acknowledged as the copyright owner - and on the front cover of the booklet accompanying Vaughan Williams: the nine symphonies, the boxed set of LPs conducted by Sir Adrian, issued as SLS 822 in the 1970s.

Garry Humphreys
London

Photograph of RVW (P.27 Journal No. 30) – again
This photograph was taken when RVW attended the wedding of Sir Adrian Boult's stepdaughter (Margaret Wilson). You can see an almost identical picture in *Ralph Vaughan Williams – A Pictorial Biography* (John E Lunn and Ursula Vaughan Williams) (Oxford 1971) (Page 74). The same picture is larger in size, adorns the front cover of the inset notes in the boxed set of RVW's *Sea Symphony* (EMI-ASD2439/40) (1968) (2 L.P. records) (both with Sir Adrian).

Although the photograph in the Journal is not actually a detail from the same picture, it was clearly taken at the same time (from RVW's morning dress, carnation etc.). The date given in the book is "1949" but in the L.P. set August 1947. I do not know which is correct, although I favour the former, but Ursula Vaughan Williams should be able to confirm. If not the notes were written by Michael Kennedy, so he should know.

Patrick A Hill

Abravanel's RVW on DVD
The recording of Ralph Vaughan Williams's *6th Symphony* and *Dona Nobis Pacem*, which in the June 2003 number of the RVW Society Journal you mentioned as "needing urgent re-issue", has in fact been re-issued recently, albeit only on DVD-Audio:

http://www.silverlineclassics.com/vwilliams_main.asp

I have no information about the actual availability of this recording outside of the United States.

Thomas Muething

Sibelia Bonham Carter and her portrait of RVW
Whilst shopping one Saturday in Reading town centre, by chance I happened to accept a free copy of *The Reading Evening Post* (June 10th 2004) – being given away in the main shopping street as a promotional exercise. On glancing through later that day, I chanced on an article about Miss Sibelia Bonham Carter (a distant relative of the actress Helena Bonham Carter) who has recently celebrated the grand age of 105 – and is believed to be the last living person to have met Florence Nightingale. On reading the article further, I was fascinated to discover that in her younger days she attended the London School of Art and as a student painted a portrait of Ralph Vaughan Williams. The portrait is now part of the National Portrait Gallery's collection of 15 different portraits of RVW. I wrote to Miss Bonham Carter to find out the circumstances of how her portrait of RVW came about. This was her reply:

"I think it was in 1926 that (while attending a concert) I found myself in the row behind Dr.RVW. The piece I remember was *Sancta Civitas*. In those days, as an art student, I always carried watercolours in my pocket in case of an opportunity (arose to paint a picture). Instead of listening to the music which I knew well, I did a watercolour portrait of him. When RVW died the portrait was given to the National Portrait Gallery."

The portrait, like many works in the Collection, is sadly not on public display, but can be viewed on the National Portrait Gallery's web site, www.npg.org.uk

This portrait, fascinating because of the unusual angle from which it is painted, does seem to capture the 'serious' side of the composer. In this small watercolour, although he was one of many people in probably a crowded auditorium, we feel the composer as a 'lone spirit' – wrapped in thought and concentration.

John Whittaker

The Greatest Britons?
Rob Furneaux's article about the BBC 2 competition sparked off a debate with a friend about the difficulties of choosing *The Greatest Briton*. We discussed the problems of choosing between scientists, engineers, politicians, artists, poets, musicians, and inventors. I was surprised that Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin was not in the top ten. Surely his discovery has saved millions of lives in the world, but a chemist was needed to develop the drug and so deserved recognition. How does one compare different Britons in their particular field of expertise? Who is to say that a composer is worth more than a scientist is because his/her skill gives humans spiritual enjoyment and pleasure? [I think he/she is worth more, but that is only my opinion.] We came to the conclusion that it was impossible to be objective and that it was just our opinion against anothers. On that basis here is my list of top British Composers and a list of top International ones.

Top Ten British Composers – chosen by Linda Hayward.

1. Ralph Vaughan Williams - I'm crazy about his music!
2. Hubert Parry - I love the Symphonies.
3. George Butterworth - A hint of what might have been.
4. Edward Elgar - His music conjures up a view of England.
5. Arthur Sullivan - Sparkling tunes.
6. Ivor Gurney - A poet and a songwriter.
7. Gustav Holst - Always something different.
8. Cecil Coles - Much admired by Holst and me.
9. Charles Stanford - He wrote a cracking clarinet concerto.
10. Gerald Finzi - He also wrote a wonderful clarinet concerto, the epitome of englishness.

My Top Ten International Composers.

1. Ralph Vaughan Williams - Simply the best!
2. George Frederic Handel - Versatile entrepreneur, and musician.
3. Antonin Dvořák - Enjoyable melodies.
4. Nicolo Paganini - Fantastic violinist who wrote exciting melodies for the instrument.
5. George Gershwin - Very versatile, and relaxed music.
6. Franz Schubert - His music is a delight to hear.
7. Frederic Chopin - Superb piano music.
8. Wolfgang Mozart - The operas are marvellous.
9. The Strauss family - Guaranteed to cheer you up.
10. Bernard Henrik Crusell - A Clarinettist's composer.

So there you have my choices which you can agree or disagree with as you like. It would be interesting to see further lists.

Linda Hayward

Elgar
Your correspondents, Robin Barber and John Tebbit, are right to deplore the BBC's treatment (through the promenade concerts in particular) of RVW's music. It seems it was ever thus for, in 1972 (the centenary year), I wrote to Sir William Glock, pointing out his extraordinary oversight in not including, if memory serves me correctly, not one of RVW

symphonies in that year's promenade concert season. Naturally I received a courteous, if vague reply. I met Sir William some years later, and it was clear he had no interest whatsoever in the music of RVW or that of Elgar for that matter.

If Elgar's music has now found more of a natural level, at least in this country, then the Elgar Society can take some credit. If this is the case then the importance of the RVW Society cannot be over-estimated.

Mr Tebbit makes an interesting point when he refers to Elgar's 'somewhat Germanic symphonies, albeit with an English accent, being performed more often than RVW's symphonies'. If this is true, then it was not always the case, and a number of people (some of great distinction) have had to fight for these performances over the years. In the Symposium *A Special Flame* which the Elgar and RVW, societies jointly held at the British Library last year, I deliberately linked the eleven symphonies of Elgar and RVW together for the discussion at the end. This pays re-reading, for a number of points emerged, some of which this society could bear in mind for the future. If, as I suspect, Elgar was a 'one off', leaving behind no particular school or following (musically), then it was generally acknowledged, particularly by RVW that Elgar's legacy had a profound importance for the development of British and RVW's music in particular. If Elgar is now an accepted part of any Prom season, then we have to see how this acceptance can be transferred to RVW and others worthy of being heard in their shadow.

Andrew Neill

VW at the Proms
I agree with the correspondents who are appalled at the lack of Vaughan Williams repertoire on offer at the Proms each year. This was not always so, in his lifetime his music was well represented. There were even Vaughan Williams Concerts! Between the nineteen thirties and the nineteen sixties there were approximately 170 performances of RVW works at the Promenade Concerts. The most frequently played piece was the *Tallis Fantasia* with 17 performances. All the symphonies were played regularly with *A London Symphony* coming first with 15 performances, followed by the *Fifth* with 8, and the *Fourth* and *Sixth* in joint third place with 7 performances each. Apart from this a good cross section of other works performed included *Flos Campi, Five Tudor Portraits, Job, Magnificat, Mass in G minor,* the *Piano Concerto, Tuba Concerto* and *Romance for Harmonica*. Other pieces had their first performances at the Proms including *Serenade to Music, Fifth Symphony, Partita for Double Orchestra, Story of Flemish Farm Suite* and *Six Choral Songs*. Given that there is a considerable link between this prestigious music festival and Ralph Vaughan Williams, I am completely baffled as to the neglect of such an important composer. It seems a perfect opportunity to promote British Composers to a world-wide audience.

Linda Hayward

Stokowski's RVW 9
I think members will be interested to learn that the Leopold Stokowski Society has obtained permission to release a historic recording of the American premiere performance of RVW's *9th Symphony* by the Symphony Orchestra of the Contemporary Music Society conducted by Leopold Stokowski in New York's Carnegie Hall on 25th September 1958. This will be made available in the Autumn as a Cala CD (contact Cala Records at 17 Shakespeare Gardens. East Finchley, London N2 9LJ, telephone 0208-883-7306 or visit website www.calarecords.com).
When ordering, mention the RVW Society!

David Betts

Tuesday November 9th 2004
7.30 pm for an 8.00 pm start.

There will be an evening talk on

'Englishness in Music'

By Lewis Foreman

at the Barns Centre in Church Road, Thame, Oxfordshire, followed by refreshments. Lewis Foreman is a well-known authority on this subject.

All members of the RVW and Elgar Societies are invited to attend. There will be no charge.

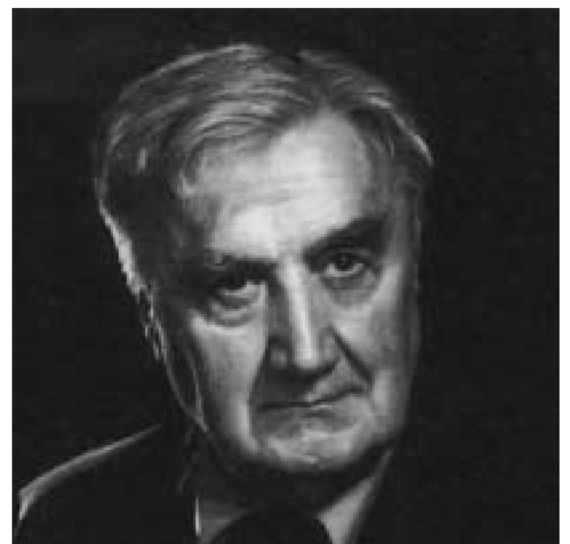
Obviously we need to have a rough idea of numbers and it would be very helpful if you would let me know if you think you might attend. That would also enable me to let you know in the unlikely event of a change in the arrangements. My contact details are on the front page of every issue of the Journal and, as soon as I hear from you, I will send a sheet of instructions on how to find the Barns Centre. I understand there is parking for 25 cars there.

David Betts
Membership Secretary

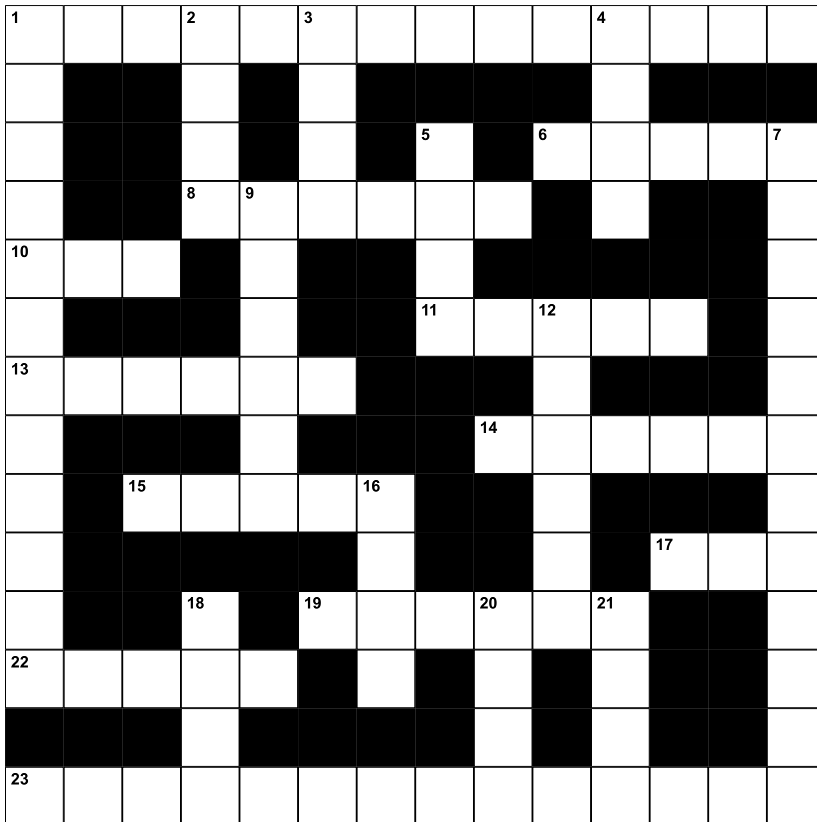
New Index

As part of our tenth Anniversary special edition, we are delighted that Linda Hayward has compiled an Index to editions 11 to 29. This follows the format used by Rolf Jordan in his earlier index to Journals 1 to 10.

Our warm thanks to Linda Hayward for this welcome contribution.



RVW Crossword No. 17 *by Michael Gainsford*



Answers on Page 32

Across

1. RVW's childhood home in Surrey (5,4,5)
6. *Hugh the Drover* was temporarily put in this (colloq) (5)
8. The tree in the second of *Ten Blake Songs* (6)
10. You need one to listen to music! (3)
11. Its nest was subject of RVW's first composition (5)
13. Sir Michael, producer of *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (6)
14. Unusual highwayman in *Folk Songs for Schools* of 1912 (6)
15. This Day (5)
17. Country subject of *Symphonic Impression* of 1904 (3)
19. W Denis who conducted the first performance of *Five English Folk Songs* in 1914 (6)
22. ** *** thought (*Hodie*) (2,3)
23. Pot-making ancestor of RVW (6,8)

Down

1. Dedicatee of *Ring out your Bells* (1902) (6,6)
2. Stumble when away from home? (4)
3. Hindu festival certainly sounds sacred (4)
4. Berg opera (4)
5. Number of Fredegond Shove poems set by RVW (4)
7. She sang at the first performance of *Cousin Michael* (1903), and *Adieu* (1904) (8,4)
9. Location of RVW's *Elegy* (6)
12. Hill in the fifth song of *On Wenlock Edge* (6)
16. Brand of the Newfoundland Folk Songs (Vol II) of 1934 (4)
18. H H Munro (4)
20. This pirate captain reigns at sea, according to folk song set by RVW (4)
21. No doubt 20 down knew these compass points at 90, 0, 180 and 270 degrees (1,1,1,1)

Next Edition: February 2005

RVW and *Glorious John*

Deadline for contributions:
10 December 2004

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Call for Papers

The June 2005 edition will be on RVW and religion

The deadline for contributions is 10 April 2005

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.