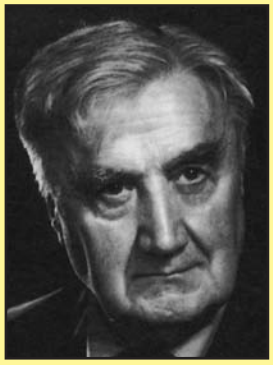


Journal of the
RVW
Society

No.35 February 2006

In this issue...

To all Members: Can you help?

Our first recording venture – the rare songs of Vaughan Williams – has reached a critical point such that we now need at least 100 members to each support us with a £100 subscription. Could you help us?

The project
The rare songs will fill two CDs. We begin with *Songs from the Operas* and this includes ten songs from *Hugh the Drover*, arranged by the composer for voice and piano. These are world premiere recordings in this arrangement and are all quite lovely. Our second CD covers the *Early Years* and includes many songs never previously recorded. These two CDs will be recorded in 2006-07 and issued separately thereafter.

There is much wonderful music here, so rare and yet of such quality! The overall project will cost around £25,000 using the finest singers and state of the art recording. We do not want to compromise on quality – thus our need for members' support to drive the project forward.

The Subscriptions' benefits
Both CDs will cost over £25,000. The Society will contribute £10,000 and we need at least £10,000 from our Subscription Series. For £100 paid to the Albion Fund members will receive the following benefits:

- A copy of both CDs once each is released
- The member's name gratefully acknowledged in the CD notes
- Invitation to a launch concert for our first CD, including a recital, drinks reception, food and souvenir programme.

To do and to dare
If you can help us realise our vision to record the rare songs then please send a cheque for £100.00 (or equivalent overseas currency) made out to the RVW Society, to Stephen Connock at the address shown alongside the article. You will receive a Subscription Certificate to mark your donation. This advance will be returned to you in full if the project is cancelled.

You will earn our gratitude forever.

Advance notice of Symposium
We are planning a residential weekend, with the Elgar Society, on the subject of religion in the music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Keep the 24-26 November 2006 free in your diary. More details in the June Journal.

Our 2006 AGM
On the subject of dates, our next AGM will be on Sunday 8 October 2006, at the Performing Arts Library, Denbies Wine Estate, Dorking. Please try and join us if you can.

CHAIRMAN
Stephen Connock MBE
65 Marathon House
200 Marylebone Road
London NW1 5PL
Tel: 01728 454820
Fax: 01728 454873
cjc@cooper94.plus.com

TREASURER
John Francis
Lindeyer Francis Ferguson
North House
198 High Street
Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1BE
Tel: 01732 360200
john@lffuk.com

SECRETARY
Dr. David Betts
Tudor Cottage
30 Tivoli Road
Brighton
East Sussex
BN1 5BH
Tel: 01273 501118
davidbetts@tudorcottage.plus.com

JOURNAL EDITOR
William Hedley
25 avenue Frederic Mistral
11400 Castelnaudary
France.
Tel: 00 33 468 60 02 08
rvwsocjournal@wanadoo.fr

2005 AGM

Discussing weighty matters, the Chairman and Paul Sarcich

James Day and Robin Barber in lighter mood

Full and frank exchanges took place after the meeting

The Warlock Singers and their conductor Graham Dinnage

The Warlock Singers

The Warlock Singers

The special guest at this year's AGM was

JAMES DAY

He spoke to members about

"ENGLISHNESS" and VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

The full text of his address is reproduced here

I hope you won't mind if I begin by drawing attention to the centenaries that fall this year of two distinguished English musicians. About one, Sir Michael Tippett, I shall have a bit more to say later. I should like to start with the other, Constant Lambert, particularly because of his attitude to Vaughan Williams and "musical Englishness".

In a sense, Vaughan Williams "discovered" Lambert. He drew enthusiastic attention to the lad's promising talent when he showed Edward Dent an unusual fugal exercise that Lambert had written for him at the Royal College of Music. Lambert always wanted, as Vaughan Williams had done a generation earlier, to get away from the Teutonic earnestness that he felt still adversely affected English music. Like Vaughan Williams, he sought an antidote in France.[1] Vaughan Williams studied with Ravel and admired Debussy. Lambert admired not only Debussy but also and for different reasons, Satie and Chabrier. Like Vaughan Williams, Lambert greatly admired Sibelius as a master musical architect who did not need to distort his orchestral or harmonic style to achieve genuine originality.[2] Like Vaughan Williams, Lambert was highly sceptical about much of Stravinsky's output after World War 1, but recognised the greatness of *Les Noces*. Like Vaughan Williams, Lambert looked to unexpected quarters to liberate his personal style: Vaughan Williams to folk song, Lambert to jazz. He particularly admired Duke Ellington; and *The Rio Grande* is by no means the only piece that shows the influence of jazz. It's worth remembering, too, that at a time when jazz was looked at askance by our musical establishment, Vaughan Williams reminded his American audience at Bryn Mawr in 1932 that he considered jazz a genuinely 'American' kind of music and that American art-musicians should not overlook the fact. And by a delightful coincidence, Lambert, like Vaughan Williams, introduced a prize-fight into one of his early stage works.[3] Admittedly, Lambert's scenario was somewhat more tongue-in-cheek than that of *Hugh the Drover*, but a prize-fight on the musical stage makes a welcome change from the1920's musical equivalent of cries of "Tennis, anybody?"

That perverse and brilliant book *Music Ho*! was published when Lambert was in his late twenties. It appeared a year before Vaughan Williams shocked, if not indeed rocked, the English musical scene with his *Fourth Symphony*; and it contains some interesting if rather double-edged comments on Vaughan Williams's previous essay in the form, the *Pastoral*. Lambert is much less hard on Vaughan Williams than he is on the neo-classical Stravinsky or on Paul Hindemith. When he refers approvingly to Bartók's melodic line, for example, he adds: "like that of Vaughan Williams at his best, [it] is intensely individual while yet drawing its inflections from national song". He clearly admired *Job*: he was after all the first conductor to bring that great work to life in the theatre, where it belongs, rather than in the concert hall. He drew attention to the originality of *Flos Campi*, citing both it and *Job* as works that future critics would probably consider more important than Vaughan Williams's symphonies. (Well, up to a point, Lord Copper… At the time Lambert wrote *Music Ho*! there were still six Vaughan Williams's symphonies to come; and Lambert died, of course, before Vaughan Williams composed the last two of them.)

Like many of his generation, Lambert was ostensibly quite out of sympathy with that meditative pastoral vein based on folk-song that many people – ignoring about two-thirds of Vaughan Williams's output – still consider the essence of musical "Englishness". Yet traces of it can even be found in the rumbustious *Rio Grande*, especially when the solo violin inserts a hint of pentatonic lyric melancholy that almost foreshadows the *Serenade to Music*. And the *Aubade Héroïque* that Lambert dedicated to Vaughan Williams on his 70th birthday is certainly in that sense one of Lambert's own most "English" works: understated, reflective and pastoral. It even has the undercurrent of menace and disquiet that are to be found in the *Pastoral Symphony*, which is hardly surprising, for, like parts of the *Pastoral*, it was inspired by a wartime scene. Moreover, like the *Pastoral*, it is a musical image of "a foreign field that is forever England": a Dutch[4] field, whereas that of the *Pastoral* is French.

It's also perhaps worth noting that Lambert's very early works, such as the ballet *Prize Fight, Mr Bear Squash You All Flat*, and at times *Pomona* and *Romeo and Juliet*, display a beefy, robust tunefulness of the kind one associates not only with Vaughan Williams but with much earlier composers such as Arne and Boyce. Lambert liked a good, rhythmically straightforward tune; and he particularly admired Boyce's music as part of a sturdy English musical tradition. He edited and conducted Boyce's symphonies; and the ballet *The Prospect before us* that he arranged and recorded from Boyce's music introduced it to a theatre public to which it was probably quite unfamiliar. Lambert also shared with Vaughan Williams, Britten and Tippett an intense admiration for Henry Purcell. It was thanks to his enthusiasm for Purcell that the Royal Opera House re-opened its doors in 1946 with *The Fairy Queen* and not by "shaking the dead bones of Norma", to borrow a phrase quite as scathing as many coined by Lambert himself.

I suspect, in fact, that Lambert and Vaughan Williams had rather more in common than either would have cared to admit and I believe that these similarities are not coincidental, but aspects of both Vaughan Williams's and Lambert's English heritage, which is why I have devoted so much time so far to Lambert.

What factors contribute to that heritage? Here's how a writer in *The Atlantic Monthly* tried to define "Englishness" just two years ago:

I should say for a start that to be English is to be mildly embarrassed by the very concept of "identity." To continue with the paradox for a moment: The English are famous above all for their insularity… the insularity of the English has been complicated by two striking anomalies: their ethnic dilution and their history-making propensity for exporting people…Then, owing in part to its extraordinary capacity to borrow and assimilate, the English language has become nearly sovereign as a global lingua franca…

The writer continues:

The English have a justified reputation for being sturdy and prosaic, yet they have excelled in poetry above all the arts. They are often thought to be shy and retiring and even (by Hollywood especially) affected to the point of effeminacy. Yet few peoples have shown a more frightening and ruthless aptitude for violence. Their fondness for flowers and animals is a national as well as an international joke, yet there is scant evidence of equivalent tenderness in, say, the national cuisine. (Ask the President of the French Republic!) The general tendency is distinctly egalitarian and democratic, even populist, yet the cult of aristocracy and hierarchy is astonishingly tenacious.

In other words, the English character, like almost all national characters, is full of contradictions and paradox.

Yet that does not mean that it's a myth. We do like to believe that we are insular. Yet our language does have an extraordinary capacity to borrow and assimilate. The vocabulary of English has complex roots, something which has enabled writers to exploit its consequent richness and subtle lights and shadows, if they so will, (many do not). We can differentiate between freedom and liberty; fraternity and brotherhood – imagine Siegfried and Gunther swearing an oath of sanguinary fraternity, for example; deadly, fatal and lethal; earnest and serious; fair and just; and so on. But English also abounds in forceful subtleties of rhythm, sound and stress, especially its syncopated bi-syllables, its percussive consonant-clusters, its wealth of vowel-colour as opposed to vowel frequency (received standard English has twelve pure vowels, for example, to Italian's eight) and its subtleties of speech-inflexion. All these are qualities that can be exploited in music. We have excelled in poetry above all the arts – but let us not forget that Shakespeare and his contemporaries, including our great madrigal composers, owed a great debt to Italian themes and models.

George Orwell once claimed that gentleness was a notable characteristic of English civilisation. Again: Up to a point, Lord Copper. Like most other peoples, we do at times have a frightening appetite for violence, whether it finds its outlet in football hooliganism, or mob riots such as were common in the 18th century. Certainly violence features quite prominently in our music. *Mars, the Bringer of War*, for example, can still astonish us thanks to its stark realism about a subject hitherto associated with glamorous cavalry charges, chivalry, pomp, circumstance and the hope of glory. I suppose it is also to some extent true that many English people are snobbish enough to love a title: "Hark, my soul, it is a Lord", as Evelyn Waugh once put it, parodying a well-known Victorian hymn. One could even argue, tongue-in-cheek, that Vaughan Williams was decidedly un-English in avoiding a knighthood.

Two further components, however, seem to me worth mentioning. Firstly, there is a notable capacity for lateral rather than mathematically logical thinking. In music, for example, Benjamin Britten followed up the success of *Peter Grimes* not with another large-scale piece, but with his chamber operas.[5] (Of course, the artistic and administrative resources available strongly influenced the scale and scope of the operas themselves – a notably pragmatic attitude and another characteristic said to be very British.) The church parables, too, provide another piece of lateral thinking, this time cross-cultural. (How un-insular can you get?) A variant of such lateral thinking is perhaps found in our love of the paradoxical and the eccentric, for example in the topsy-turvy world of *Tristram Shandy, Alice in Wonderland, The Goons, Monty Python* and W S Gilbert's operetta plots. (Does *The Poisoned Kiss* fit in here, perhaps?)

Secondly, there is what one might describe as an ethical spirituality. Vaughan Williams was often at pains to point out that the black dots on the paper were intended to create what he considered a "spiritual" effect. I sometimes rather wish he had defined what he meant by "spiritual". However, just as one may not be able to define an elephant, one can certainly recognise one. So let it be with Vaughan Williams's spirituality. The finest example, to my mind, is that under-performed masterpiece *Sancta Civitas*, with its shattering apocalyptic vision of Armageddon and the New Jerusalem, all prefaced by a strange quotation from Plato. One of the reasons why I personally find such works as *Sancta Civitas*, the *Fifth Symphony* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* so moving is this indefinable radiant "spiritual" dimension.

Vaughan Williams accepted and shared our quirks and our qualities, but he never accepted nor recommended any kind of little-Englishry. This is what he had to say in *Nationalism and Internationalism*, written at the height of the Second World War:

loyalty to one's country can only come to a full flowering when it is merged in a wider loyalty to the whole… I believe that political internationalism and personal individualism are necessary complements: one cannot exist without the other… I believe that the love of one's country, one's language, one's customs, one's religion

(this, from a lifelong agnostic!)

are essential to our spiritual health. We may laugh at these things but we love them none the less. Indeed it is one of our national characteristics and one which I should be sorry to see disappear, that we laugh at what we love.

(I can't imagine Vaughan Williams ever actually laughing at folk-song – but surely he must at first glance have found certain folk-song arrangements by Holst and Britten a little, shall we say, unexpected? Yet the arrangements were in his view made with love; and that was what mattered.) But even here there was a paradox that he regarded as typically English. He continues:

(Laughing at things we love) is something that a foreigner can never fathom[6]*, but it is out of such characteristics, these hard knots in our timber, that we can help the human race. But without that local loyalty there can be nothing for the wider issues to build on. I believe that all that is of value in our spiritual and cultural life springs from our own soil; but this life cannot develop and fructify except in an atmosphere of friendship and sympathy with other nations.*

Some people might argue that this argument from the geographic and the genetic to the aesthetic, if we may put it that way, is based on a false premiss. I disagree. For purposes of local colour, composers like Telemann, Handel and Bach acknowledged that within the cosmopolitan style of their era it was possible to compose *à la française, à l'italienne, à la polonaise*, even *à l'anglaise* (what could be more English than the hornpipe from Handel's *Water Music*?) But this "national" strain was not a political statement. That came into music with Romanticism and its volatile 19th-century cultural ally, political nationalism. I say nationalism advisedly: patriotism - the love of one's country divorced from any need to assert that love at the expense of other nations - long predated the political movements that gradually broke up the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and later on, our own. Music had played a significant part - notably in Handel's oratorios and anthems such as *Zadok the Priest* - in expressing our own sense of national identity and destiny a century before Smetana's operas and tone-poems did so for the Czechs, or Mussorgsky and the rest of the "mighty handful" for the Russians, Verdi for the Italians and Wagner for the Germans.

National character of the kind that we find in the music of Vaughan Williams, of Elgar, Walton, Britten, Tippett, Lambert (and, I would argue, in certain living composers such as the current Master of the Queen's Music) is much more a matter of the mood that the music expresses than the musical idiom in which it is cast. Parts of Lambert's only film score, for the wartime film *Merchant Seamen*, sound to me almost like bits of an uncompleted folk rhapsody. Another important aspect of "Englishness" has much to do with what the French christened *le spleen* – a kind of melancholy with a bitter, often morbid tinge that they consider, rightly or wrongly, to be characteristically English. We find this in the slow movement of Lambert's *Piano Concerto*, for example. In *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, and the *Dirge from Cymbeline*, it reflects the more macabre side of Elizabethan life and culture. I think we find it at times in Britten too – in parts of the *Serenade* and the *Nocturne*, in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Death in Venice*; possibly, even, in the robust fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We may also trace it in some works by later composers such as Peter Maxwell Davies (as in *Eight Songs for a Mad King*) and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

Lambert's main criticism of the *Pastoral Symphony* in *Music Ho*! was that "the creation of a particular type of grey, reflective, English-landscape mood [had] outweighed the exigencies of symphonic form". This is nonsense. The structure of the *Pastoral* is unobtrusive, but none the less firm and, as Lambert himself pointed out, it grows out of the shape of the thematic material:

Unlike so many composers with whom the creation of musical material and its subsequent treatment appear to be two separate mental processes, Vaughan Williams nearly always evolves his form from the implications of the melody and rarely submits his themes to a Procrustean development (He) avoids the complete contrast between mood and method shown by such a fabricated symphony as Dvorak's From the New World

Perhaps the forms of the *Pastoral* puzzled Lambert because they did not follow the pattern of what has been called the "linear" type of symphony, where the finale is the logical outcome of the tensions inherent in the previous movements. But Vaughan Williams was capable of writing that kind of symphony, too: witness the Fourth and the Sixth, two of the tautest symphonic arguments in the entire history of the form.

Donald Tovey, in his only published essay on a Vaughan Williams symphony, underlined the originality of Vaughan Williams' approach in the *Pastoral*:

Melodies older than any folk-song are harmonized on the plan first reduced to formula by Debussy: whatever chord the melody begins with is treated as a mere sensation, and the chord follows the melody up and down the scale but Vaughan Williams adds to this principle another, which is that two or even three melodic threads may run simultaneously, each loaded with its own chord, utterly regardless of how their chords collide…the systematic application of (this principle) to the anti-contrapuntal method of Debussy is new.

Tovey seems to have been wary of rather than sympathetic to Vaughan Williams' symphonic lateral thinking here [7]. Vaughan Williams does not resolve these dissonances in the conventional manner, but neither does he exploit the tensions that they create in the harmonic movement. They just are. Moreover, the orchestral and harmonic texture of the *Pastoral* actually varies very much more subtly than that of many works of its period, but it does so within carefully controlled limits. Take a cross-section, for instance, through any of the rare moments in the *Pastoral* where the dynamic rises to *forte* or *fortissimo* and you find that Vaughan Williams colours his climactic moments quite differently each time.

To me, at any rate, much of the *Pastoral*[8] seems to convey an intense sense of awesome loneliness in the face of nature. Occasionally, as in the great unison cry of the strings in the finale, this rises to a kind of protest, but on the whole it is simply accepted "just because it's there". It's worth remembering here that two great English artists, namely Turner and Constable, were among the first to transcend traditional picturesque, ordered landscape in favour of projecting their wonder and loneliness at nature's power. Andrew Graham-Dixon[9] has written of Constable: "(He) shook up the still world of western art like a child shaking a toy snowstorm. After him painting would never quite look the same again." And of Turner[10]: " (He) became his own god. And Turner said "let there be light. And there was light." Dare one suggest that this is also one of our national characteristics - think of Britten's *Sea Interludes*, especially *Dawn and Moonlight* - and that it complements rather than contradicts our sense of the pastoral peace of the English countryside?

The fact that both Lambert and Tovey mention Debussy is more than just fortuitous. The exploitation for his own purposes of impressionist (or, some would say, neo-medieval) harmonic techniques lies at the heart of Vaughan Williams' "Englishness". Vaughan Williams himself said he was "horrified" when Lambert pointed out to him that he had unconsciously cribbed from *La Mer* in the first movement of the *London Symphony*; and the early critics of the blithe *G minor Quartet*, to crib Michael Kennedy's nail-on-the-head term - apart from *Children's Corner*, you couldn't call many of Debussy's works "blithe" - and of *On Wenlock Edge* may certainly be forgiven for accusing Vaughan Williams of "having tea with Debussy". The influence of Debussy and more particularly of Ravel in Vaughan Williams' mature works is unmistakable. But the important thing, as Ravel himself said, was that Vaughan Williams was the only one of his pupils "*qui n'écrit pas de ma musique*." Ravel recognised that his pupil, three years his elder, had assimilated what he had to teach him, not merely regurgitated it.

The critics who chastised Vaughan Williams for engaging in Debussyisms and Ravellery were in fact drawing attention to another very important aspect of his Englishness and one which bore its most "English" fruit from the 1920's onwards. This characteristic is our openness to influences from outside our own culture and our ability to integrate them into that culture. This trait has often been misunderstood by critics of such composers as Elgar, Tippett, Britten and Vaughan Williams himself. They mistook the Brahmsian, or Wagnerian, or Debussyesque or Mahlerian trees in their musical soundscape for the wood as a whole. It reflects, I believe, the nature of our complex, subtle and wonderfully expressive language.

Eclecticism is a feature of our language and our entire culture. For example: how Shakespeare and his contemporaries exulted in "naturalising" Italian themes and forms! How imaginatively our landscape gardeners first absorbed the influences of the geometrical, regimented baroque garden; then developed out of it the "picturesque" park-like gardens of the great 18th century masters, with their lakes, classical temples and grottos; later on incorporating picturesque pagodas and gothic ruins. Such subtle assimilation has certainly played an important part in our music, too, from the time of the Elizabethan madrigalists to the present day.

Writing elsewhere about Hubert Parry's splendid *Symphonic Variations*, Tovey had this to say on the subject of "Englishness" in music:

An English style ought, if English music were comparable to English literature, to be the most universal and resourceful of all styles. That is one reason why the best English art can never afford to be provincial and uneducated. An English Berlioz is simply out of the question. The unteachable Berlioz grew up surrounded by artistic logicians and disciplinarians. The unteachable Englishman grows up among people and institutions as chaotically instinctive as himself, with dullness ever at hand as a safe solution of the problems of life.

I wonder which unteachable Englishmen Tovey was thinking of when he wrote that? (Answers to the Editor of the Journal on a postcard please, by next Friday. J.D.) He continued:

The way to attain a true English style is Parry's way: the way of knowledge. That is also the way of instinct; for adequate knowledge allows for instinct and uses it

I believe that English musicians have, like our poets and painters, always and unashamedly learned from and absorbed elements from abroad and that an English style in music ought indeed to be the most universal and resourceful of all styles. Vaughan Williams's certainly was. True, the less gifted of them have ended up wearing the second-hand mantles of their continental Elijahs; but the more imaginative, like Elgar, Tippett, Britten and Vaughan Williams, have managed to create magnificent stylistic garments of their own.

True assimilation involves adding our own characteristic features to what we absorb. Writing about Elgar's symphonies, Dr Mosco Carner suggested half a century ago that a very characteristic kind of abrupt withdrawal after a moment of high musical ecstasy immediately struck the continental brought up in the Austro-German tradition as something highly original and peculiarly English. This is found in spiritually ambitious pieces such as, say, *Nimrod or Sabbath Morning at Sea*. It is also found in the tune inextricably associated with the words "Land of Hope and Glory" and in Hubert Parry's noble setting of Blake's *Jerusalem*: the climax comes in the penultimate strain; the music then dies away into a more reflective mood. We experience the moment of glory and then, for whatever reason, quietly keep it to ourselves.

There is a passage at the end of the *Pastoral* that sounds to me rather as if Ravel had advised Hubert Parry on the scoring and harmonisation of a slow, solemn dance. It creates a kind of sublime, all too brief revelation of glory before the music eventually fades away into enigmatic nothingness.[11] Vaughan Williams does this again, with a grim and more startling effect, when the harsh, jerky thematic fragments first coalesce into the great majestic tune at the close of the first movement of the *Sixth Symphony* and then suddenly collapse into the sinister *Moderato*.

Vaughan Williams mentioned "laughing at the things we love". On the one hand, Arthur Sullivan was able to adopt a processional Handelian vein almost at will when Gilbert's words prompted him to send up, say, John Bullish patriotism. Think of "For he is an Englishman" in *HMS Pinafore* or, best of all, the splendid tune that he composed to Gilbert's "When Britain really ruled the waves" in Act 2 of *Iolanthe*. On the other, the unmistakable "English" ceremonial style, developed by Parry and Elgar and derived from Wagner in *Meistersinger* vein and Handel in all his majesty[12], was accepted in its own right as a musical expression of our sturdy, forthright sense of national pride. Was it just coincidence that two of the sturdiest instrumental tunes in this vein composed by Englishmen seemed to cry out for patriotic words[13] - and duly got them?

This consideration of mocking what we love brings me to the related subject of musical mockery and low life in general. We might call this our Hogarthian side. By Hogarthian, I mean drawn to the vulgar vitality of low life. Not long before the outbreak of World War 1, in his essay *Who wants the English Composer?*, Vaughan Williams drew attention to this. He suggested that the vitality of a robust music-hall song was worth all the scrapings of the Teutonic barrel preferred by some of his

contemporaries; and later, in some measure thanks to Elgar's prompting, he went on to prove it.

Elgar himself once sketched out a ballet based on Rabelais (Oh *Swan Lake*! Oh *Sylphides*!) The music eventually went into *Falstaff*, thinly disguised as Mistress Quickly's "honest gentle women". Vaughan Williams didn't quite take up Elgar's suggestion that he should make an oratorio out of Skelton's *Elinor Rumming*, but in three of the movements of *Five Tudor Portraits* he produced what is to my mind a wonderful series of earthy musical caricatures that stand comparison with Hogarth's pictures of 18th-century low life[14]. Elgar and Vaughan Williams share this sense of robust, mocking, frankly vulgar fun with Henry Purcell, who could project the robust, "popular" character in the music that he composed for the sailors in *Dido and Aeneas* without straining his style, and who also wrote perfectly-shaped and highly suggestive catches to scurrilous texts. And what about Elgar's cheeky cockney street-boy "citizens" in *Cockaigne* and the mouth - and barrel - organs of the scherzo of the *London Symphony*? Or the cheeky good-humoured send-ups to be found in Walton's *Façade*?

Yet the "hunger-march" episode in the finale of *London Symphony* also contains a chilling Dickensian reminder, too, that there was more to the short and simple annals of the poor than prosperity, outdoor revelry, roast beef and patriotic pageantry. This - like so much of Vaughan Williams - is what Aldous Huxley would have called "whole-truth" art. And such conditions may generate enraged protest. There is no need to connect such powerful expressions of violent emotion as the *Fourth* and *Sixth symphonies* with any prophecy of war or vision of the world after an atomic cataclysm. The concentrated structure of the music itself simply elevates the turbulent destructive emotion onto a more abstract and universal plane.

Every so often, a culture throws up an artist who doesn't seem to fit any known category, who develops his own vision and even his own mythology - and yet somehow belongs to the culture from which he springs. In our culture, one thinks of poets and artists such as Vaughan and Traherne, perhaps of Bunyan, certainly of Laurence Sterne, William Blake and Samuel Palmer. In music, I believe that one representative of this strain is Sir Michael Tippett. John Tavener may possibly be another.

Michael Berkeley has recently put it thus in a review of Tippett's published letters[15]. He speaks of Tippett

articulating a profound thought but then, as though intellectually dyslexic, digging himself into an ever deeper and more impenetrable grave as he allowed his tongue and mind to wander over disparate ideas. You began in the Home Counties and within seconds appeared to be surveying a lunar landscape. Recording an interview with Tippett was an absolute nightmare because, for all his charm, he was almost impossible to edit. Seemingly unconnected ideas joined seamlessly together to defy even the sharpest razor blade

The phrase "as though intellectually dyslexic" seems to me to encapsulate the glory and the problem of Tippett's music: within a few bars he can switch from being frenetically busy and complex to achieving a still, small voice of calm that without sounding in the least like Elgar or Vaughan Williams is unmistakably English. At times, his music reveals its historical English credentials - the urgent madrigalian rhythms of the two outer movements of the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra*, for example, the big, almost Elgarian tune that crowns the finale, or again, the more pastoral passages of the *Fantasia Concertante on a theme of Corelli*. Yet of the "English" characteristics that I have tried to outline, eclecticism is in his case surely the most prominent. *The Rose Lake*, one of his very last compositions, is a vivid musical waterscape, inspired not by any scene in England, nor even in Europe, but in Senegal: another musical corner, perhaps, "of some foreign field that is forever England"?

The message that Tippett tries to get across again and again through his music and his texts is the importance for us all of recognising the dark as well as the light in our characters and our environment and of integrating them into a harmonious whole - "whole-truth" art again. One can sense this in the work of our greatest composers from at least Elgar onwards: think of the way the brutal "Roman" episode in *In the South* first grows out of and then is integrated into the structure of the piece, of the complex thematic inter-relationships of the two inner movements of the First Symphony, or the rise and fall of that amazing passage round about figure 120 in the *scherzo* of the *Second*. Think also of the first two movements of Walton's *First* or the fusion of intense melancholy with savage exultation - both Hebrew and heathen - in *Belshazzar's Feast*. Think of Vaughan Williams's *4th*, *6th* and *9th symphonies*, of Maxwell Davies's *Songs for a Mad King*, possibly of Birtwistle's sombre *Grimethorpe Aria* - written, incidentally, for performers of amateur status but of fully professional competence, in this case drawn from the industrial working-class, music, as Parry might have said, as befits a democrat and an Englishman.

Such "art" music not only faces, accepts and expresses the less pleasant facts about the human predicament, but also endeavours to reconcile and integrate them into a larger and finer whole. And this seems to me to be peculiarly characteristic of our culture at its best: receptive and pragmatic, but idealistic and even at times mystical; gentle but strong, striving to reconcile free expression with balance and order; aware of the darkness and violence within the human psyche; suspicious of doctrinaire and extremist attitudes; and sensitive to both the sublime and the ridiculous. Not just Britain but the whole world would be the poorer without such "whole-truth" art.

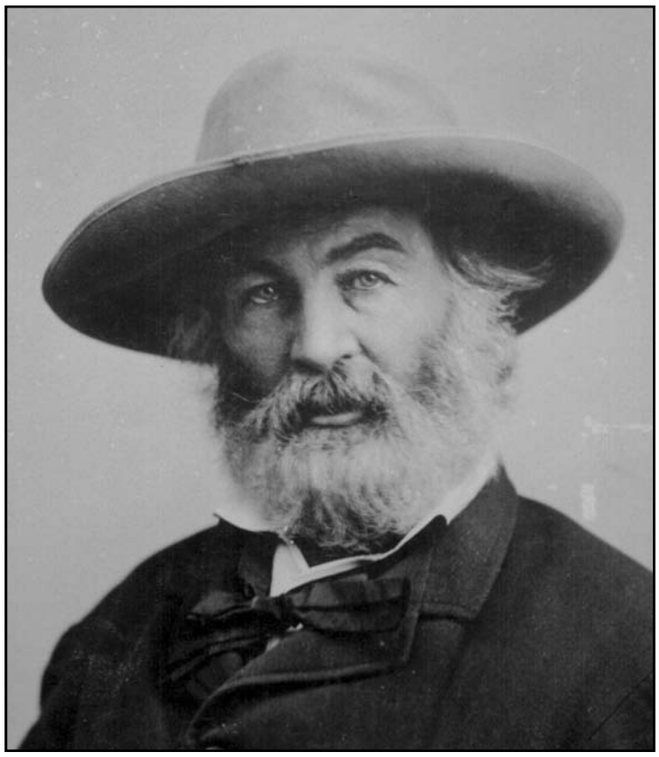
NOTES

1. Does one catch an occasional whiff of Bizet in some of Elgar's music? For example in the trio of the second *Pomp and Circumstance* March, in parts of the *Wand of Youth* and in at least two of the *Sea Pictures*?
2. RVW's tribute on Sibelius' 90th birthday is at times almost Lambertesque in its style and imagery.
3. A deliberate "crib"? I don't think so: Lambert was, rather surprisingly, quite a competent boxer during his schooldays. RVW probably wasn't, though he could be pretty pugnacious in other ways when his ire was aroused.
4. Does this matter? The Fenlands, whose bleak grandeur I have grown to appreciate over the years, are very similar in many respects to the scene that Lambert must have had in mind when he composed *Aubade Héroïque*.
5. True, *Savitri* and *Riders to the Sea* had pointed the way.
6. Personally I would question this, as I think anyone would who has ever watched an episode of *Goodness gracious me*! to mention just one example.
7. The example that he quotes from the first movement contains some splendid dissonances, such as a chord of D minor occurring simultaneously with one of B flat major and one of G major, followed by one of D major occurring simultaneously with one of G major and one of A minor.
8. And for that matter, later works, such as the *Ninth Symphony*. One gets this same feeling of an awesome, disquieting vastness from the finale of RVW's *Sixth*, too.
9. *A History of British Art*, BBC Books, 1996, page 148.
10. *ibid*., page 159
11. Byron Adams has pointed out the resemblances between the sarabande-like theme of the finale of the *Pastoral* and a movement from Ravel's *Mother Goose* Suite.
12. And found, too, in such folk-songs as *Ward the Pirate*. What a Lymn-tune *that* would have made had RVW included it in the English Hymnal!
13. *Land of Hope and Glory* and *I vow to thee, my country.*
14. Is it just my imagination that the opening gesture of *Elinor Rumming* sounds like a conflation of the opening of *Falstaff* and that of the scherzo of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*?
15. *The Guardian Review*, Friday August 26 2005.

Two Choral Settings of Whitman's Poetry:

Toward the Unknown Region and Dona Nobis Pacem

by Tony Williams



Introduction

In 1892 Vaughan Williams was introduced to the poetry of Walt Whitman by Bertrand Russell, a fellow student at Trinity College, Cambridge. Given his early radicalism and atheism it is not surprising that Vaughan Williams was immediately attracted by the American poet's celebration of democracy, the free human spirit, and nature, and his rejection of conventional Christianity. It was an appeal which lasted all Vaughan Williams's life, and he commented in 1958, in response to a question by Michael Kennedy, that he had "never got over Whitman, I'm glad to say".[1] Whitman's belief in the national roots of art clearly struck a chord with Vaughan Williams, Whitman having written in his preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in 1855, that he was creating a new democratic literature "commensurate with the people". At the beginning of his 1912 article: *Who wants the English composer?*, Vaughan Williams quotes lines from Whitman's *Song of Exposition*, and he goes on to comment on the composer's relationship to his people in the true spirit of Whitman: "The composer must not shut himself up and think about art, he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community."[2] It is significant that Vaughan Williams's first settings of Whitman in 1904 - the vocal duets *The Last Invocation* and *The Birds' Love Song* - coincided with his first period of collecting folk songs. These "superbly beautiful" country tunes, which had sprung up "like wild flowers among the people of a nation"[3], represented to Vaughan Williams a key source of inspiration for a national composer.

But it was the questioning and questing spirit of Whitman's works that initially drew Vaughan Williams most strongly to the American poet. When contemplating in 1905 what was to become his first completed work for chorus and orchestra, *Toward the Unknown Region*, Vaughan Williams turned for his text to Whitman's poem *Darest thou Now O Soul!*, from the collection entitled *Whispers of Heavenly Death* (1855), which embodies this liberal and creative spirit. Vaughan Williams set poems by Whitman of a similar philosophical character in his *Sea Symphony* which he was also composing in these years (1903-09). But this is not the only thematic import of Whitman's poetry which attracted Vaughan Williams's interest and sympathy. Already around 1911 he made a setting of Whitman's *Dirge for Two Veterans*, from the collection *Drum Taps* (1865), concerning the American Civil War, a setting which was to form a section of *Dona Nobis Pacem*. And especially following his own experience of the First World War, Vaughan Williams could find in Whitman's poems about the American Civil War an expression of revulsion at the horror of warfare comparable to his own. So when Vaughan Williams came to compose his anti-war cantata, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, in 1936, poems by Whitman provided one of his main textual sources.

Toward the Unknown Region

Toward the Unknown Region received its first performance at the Leeds Festival in October 1907. Vaughan Williams began work on the piece partly as a result of a competition with his friend Gustav Holst: each was to set Whitman's text - a poet equally admired by Holst - and they would then decide who had made the more effective setting. "The prize was awarded by us to me", as Vaughan Williams wrote many years later to Holst's daughter.[4]

In *A Musical Autobiography* Vaughan Williams wrote that "the object of art is to stretch out to the ultimate realities through the medium of beauty."[5] One of the ultimate realities for Vaughan Williams was the idea of life as a voyage with a goal each person has to discover for himself or herself. This quest he found expressed in Whitman's *Darest Thou Now O Soul!* In Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* the Priest sings, at the moment of Gerontius's death: "Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul", a journey which is subsequently described in graphic detail in Newman's dramatic poem, and even more graphically in Elgar's glorious music. Moreover, the Soul of Gerontius is prepared for the different stages of his path through his encounter with the Angel. In contrast Whitman and Vaughan Williams present a vision of this life on earth, as a journey into the unknown, with "no map there". Text and music celebrate life as a spiritual voyage undertaken by each individual alone, breaking free of all traditional and conventional ties. Vaughan Williams's "Song" is the work of a young composer who has discovered, and become confident about, his creative powers. But his message - and that of the poet - is not limited to the artist. Potentially and essentially the notion of a spiritually productive life in freedom is valid for all human beings, and what Whitman - "that universal-souled democrat"[6] - had in mind was a community of liberated souls. In the poem we hear the voice of an individual addressing - and challenging - his or her soul. Yet there is no soloist in Vaughan Williams' setting, the words are sung by the chorus, representing humanity in general, each member of which may participate in the journey.[7]

A mood of solemnity and quiet dignity is established at the outset, when the orchestra plays a three-bar phrase, with scoring of rich, dark hue, which becomes an important thematic motif in the work. A slightly shortened, sparer version of the phrase provides the chorus with its first entry. But before the chorus sings, repeated soft horn fanfares, interspersed with *pizzicato* phrases in the lower strings, evoke drama and tension. For there is not confidence in the opening words; the voice expresses a challenge, whose outcome is not certain: "Darest thou, now, O soul, walk out with me toward the unknown region." There are doubts, difficulties, and regrets. A repeated phrase played by unison strings, "mysterious", even slightly menacing in character, to the accompaniment of the soft horn fanfares, foreshadows the qualms soon to be expressed: "No map there, nor guide". The traveller will be without the warmth and consolation of human company, of love. There is a change of key and a lyrical theme is introduced for the words: "nor touch of human hand, nor face with blooming flesh". Now the orchestra plays alone and comments on this in a beautiful passage of Elgarian warmth, which conveys the

value of what will be left behind. After a brief return to the work's opening, the pace quickens slightly as the positive aspects of the journey are now contemplated, in music of growing exquisiteness which develops the lyrical motif. This section culminates in the words "all waits undreamed of", sung very quietly, as if a prospect one dare scarcely hope for, since that which is undreamed of is in "that inaccessible land". In the second half of the work there is a proliferation of *animando* markings as elation gradually becomes the dominant emotion and the music moves through a series of climaxes. The first of these is the moment of liberation, which makes the unknown region and its undreamed of possibilities accessible. Here the choir sings, *fortissimo*: "Then we burst forth", the first of the words in unison, holding an F for four bars. The music develops into a noble melody, reminiscent of Parry, with which the choir celebrates unbound freedom: "we float in time and space". The pace quickens all the time amid growing excitement. Musically there are two final climactic moments as – thus my tentative interpretation of the poem's closing lines – ultimate fulfilment is envisaged as exploration and discovery now in the company of equals. An ecstatic "O joy" is led by the tenors who rise from unison C to top G. And the work closes in an exultant blaze, as divided sopranos and tenors rise from unison C to top F and A, for "O soul", whilst altos and first basses hold on to C, and second basses drop to F, completing a perfect cadence in the home key of F Major. It is a conclusion of shattering impact.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem was composed for the Huddersfield Choral Society's centenary in October 1936 and received its première on 2 October of that year. What Vaughan Williams wrote was no celebratory song of praise for the famous Yorkshire choir, but a warning concerning the growing danger of renewed warfare engulfing Europe and the wider world, and a vision of peace. The Civil War in Spain, Hitler's persecution of the Jews and his march into the Rhineland, and Mussolini's aggression in Abyssinia were ominous portents in this respect by 1936. Moreover, Vaughan Williams's own experience of the First World War entered into the composition of *Dona Nobis Pacem*. He could easily have evaded military service, for he was over 40 years of age and, as his medical examiners ascertained, he had flat feet. And he was one of the country's leading composers. But he could not accept Sir Hubert Parry's advice, in August 1914, that as an artist he should exempt himself from the conflict because of his special gifts with which he could serve the nation. As a citizen Vaughan Williams felt it his duty and responsibility to enlist. He opted for the Royal Army Medical Corps and was involved in ferrying the dead and wounded from the trenches of northern France. So he gained first-hand knowledge of the brutality, devastation, and horror of war. One of his closest friends in music, the talented young composer George Butterworth, was killed, other composer friends and colleagues, such as Ivor Gurney, were severely wounded or mentally scarred for life (Gurney died in an asylum.)

To a certain extent Vaughan Williams anticipated by twenty-five years Benjamin Britten's method in his *War Requiem* of interspersing the Latin Mass with English poems, those by Wilfred Owen. Vaughan Williams set part of the *Agnus Dei* from the Mass, appropriate biblical texts, and a speech by a nineteenth-century British peace campaigner, John Bright (1811-1889). But at the heart of the cantata are settings of three war poems by Walt Whitman, whose response to the American Civil War (1861-5) was similar to that of Vaughan Williams to the First World War. Whitman was incensed at the devastation and overcome by the cruelty and pain inflicted. In the first year of the Civil War he worked as a freelance journalist and visited victims of the conflict in Union army hospitals in New York. In 1862 he moved to Washington to care for his brother who had become a war casualty. Overwhelmed by the suffering of the many wounded and dying in Washington, Whitman decided to stay on and help out in hospitals. The little money he had came from modest royalties and his meagre salary as a clerk in the Department of the Interior, but he used some of it to buy medication and supplies for the patients he nursed. In his own lifetime Whitman was, in fact, better known for his humanitarian work than for his poetry.

Dona Nobis Pacem is divided into six sections, which are played without a break and are interlinked.

I

The singing of the *Agnus Dei* in the first section sets the scene for the cantata, since the focus is almost entirely on the words: "Dona nobis pacem". The soprano soloist declaims the ancient liturgical prayer quietly, briefly raising her voice to forte on the first syllable of "dona". The chorus takes up the prayer for peace, initially quietly, but then all calm is shattered by their repeated impassioned outburst at "dona". With full orchestral accompaniment at these moments, their singing becomes a dissonant, anguished cry.

II

Beat! Beat! Drums! is the first of three Whitman settings, all of which are taken from Drum Taps. There are links of motif and theme between the first two sections. A drop of a semitone, which occurs repeatedly in "dona", appears in several groups of words in the second section, notably in "Beat! beat! drums!". The rising and descending phrases in "Agnus Dei" and "qui tollis peccata mundi" recur in "no happiness must he have with his bride" and elsewhere, identical notes now in grotesque guise. The American Civil War was the first of the mechanised wars in which the whole population was involved, and no one spared, neither "scholar", "congregation", nor "peaceful farmer". The section paints a terrifying picture of the brutal destruction of civilisation and ordinary life. Dissonances abound, and strident scoring, with brass and percussion prominent, accompanies declamatory choral writing. The fierce rhythms are characterised by persistent triplets on drums, in brass fanfares and elsewhere, and by bumpy syncopation. Dissonance, scoring and rhythms bring to mind Vaughan Williams's angry, violent *Fourth Symphony* of 1931-4.

III

The tumult subsides, the rhythm slackens and there is a transition to the "Andantino" of the third section; the upper strings intone the B which leads into the beautiful melody at the beginning of *Reconciliation*, another Whitman setting. Moreover, this melody develops out of a magical transformation of the rising and descending phrases associated in the second section with the breakdown of peaceful, everyday life. The triplet figure, which in the previous movement had risen to such violence, appears now calmed and softened, melodic as well as rhythmical. With its quiet, lyrical music and the prominent markings *cantabile* and *dolce*, this section forms a memorable contrast to the preceding one. The opening melody is taken up, developed, and varied by the baritone soloist and the chorus during the course of *Reconciliation*. Yet there is an ambivalence in this movement, a combination of pessimism and optimism which, in fact, informs the work as a whole. On the one hand, as firstly the baritone and then the chorus observe, the killing goes on, and thus "Death and Night" have to wash "this soiled world" again and again. In the central part of this section, which is similar in mood to Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting*, as set by Benjamin Britten in the last movement of his *War Requiem*, the baritone soloist feels compassion for an enemy soldier who lies dead, sensing their common humanity: "a man divine as myself". This moment of reconciliation is based on the poet's recognition of the futility, stupidity as well as brutality of war, to which both sides are subject, of which they can be victims. On the other hand, the possibility of recovery and renewal is envisaged in the poet's words: "Beautiful … that the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly, wash again and ever again, this soiled world". We become aware of the gentleness of the image, as of someone caring for the sick. The word "beautiful" occurs twice in the opening lines, as sung by the baritone and subsequently the chorus, and again by the chorus towards the end of the section. This accounts for the serene character of the opening melody and, together with the mood of reconciliation, the lyrical, often ravishing quality of the music in this movement. And the words: "Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost" indicate that bloody conflict will not continue indefinitely, and suggest, perhaps, that human kind can learn from what has happened. But for now the war is still on, its end but a distant prospect, and the solo soprano concludes the section with her plea for peace from the opening movement. Moreover, her final "pacem" overlaps into the fourth section, which presents a further tragedy of war.

IV

Like the preceding *Reconciliation*, the elegiac *Dirge for Two Veterans* is full of passages of exquisite beauty. It opens with a quiet, solemn march, played *cantabile*. The chorus enters with a tender, glowing evocation of the setting sun. But the last sunbeam falls on a newly made double grave, and this confirms the funereal character of the march, whose rhythms

have continued – softly and intermittently – in the orchestra. As the melodic material of the march continues to be developed in the choral writing and lyrical orchestral accompaniment, the soprano sings rapturously of the moonlight. And yet the scene they paint is not without eeriness, as befits their metaphor: "ghastly, phantom moon", whilst plucked lower strings and harp hint at the fanfares. Soon the sad procession of the funeral is observed, the city streets "flooding as with voices and with tears". The quietness is shattered and the "full-keyed bugles" and drums become ever more prominent as the procession draws closer. The notes and their dotted rhythms for "great convulsive drum" and (in the) "fierce assault they fell" - referring to the two victims' death on the battlefield – are similar. This emphasises that the funereal bugles and drums, stridently represented by most of the brass and percussion employed in *Beat! Beat! Drums!*, are painful reminders of the horrors of war: "every blow of the great convulsive drums strikes me through and through". In a further beautiful passage the chorus sings softly of the tragedy of a father and son, whose funeral this is, having fallen together in battle. The drums and brass are transformed into instruments of noble commemoration, and the march unfolds in splendour, now in the key of C Major. At its conclusion there is ravishing, quiet, elegiac music, with violins playing octave triplets above minim chords of the harp. Arnold Bax must have been deeply impressed by this serene passage, for there is surely an echo of it in the Epilogue of his Symphony No. 7 (1938-9). [8] The magical scoring continues and the music becomes ever warmer in the exquisite closing part. The chorus, observing the moon once more, sings of it as a figure symbolising compassion: "'Tis some mother's large, transparent face, in heaven brighter growing!" First "soothed" by this moon, the chorus – led by the basses – is itself then filled with compassion for the fallen: "My heart gives you love". The orchestra returns to the music of the beginning of the section but, in keeping with the moment, in a more tender version, with cellos prominent and the march rhythm less persistent. There is, however, a change of mood shortly before the end of the movement: unease sets in with shifts of key, which finally settles into the E Minor of the baritone solo at the beginning of the fifth section.

V

For now Vaughan Williams returns to the barbarity and devastation of war. In a hushed, recitative-style passage, the baritone is given words from a speech made by John Bright in the House of Commons on 23 February, 1855, Vaughan Williams claiming to be the only man ever to set to music words spoken in the House of Commons! Bright was a Liberal MP for Durham. He was a member of the Peace Society - the earliest organised peace movement – and he denounced the Crimean War (1854-56), most famously in his "Angel of Death" speech, for which he was accused of treason by some MPs and abused by the press. No one is spared from the ravages of war: "There is no one, as of old, to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our doors, that he (the Angel of Death) may spare and pass on." Here Bright alludes to the Bible story found in Exodus, where God sent his angel to kill the firstborn children of Egypt, but spared any Israelite who painted his door posts with blood. The music suddenly rises to *fortissimo* and the chorus intervenes with their impassioned plea for peace from the first movement, and the soprano soloist follows suit. Now Vaughan Williams employs a passage from the Book of Jeremiah, and the chorus laments the devastation that has been visited upon the land. They sing in frequently dissonant tones, initially subdued, but their despair is barely controlled and threatens to overwhelm them, as their voices become raised in their anguish that no end to the horror is in sight.

VI

But at the beginning of the sixth section the baritone answers the chorus with words of reassurance and the promise of peace. Here Vaughan Williams quotes from the Book of Daniel and the Book of Haggai. He also employs other texts from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament Gospel of St Luke. The idea of peace is reflected on in an orchestral passage that introduces a serene theme, played first by cellos and double basses, then violas, and then embellished by violins. The texture of the music here is reminiscent of the *Tallis Fantasia*, but this music also points forward to the beautiful tune, played by violins and flutes, at the beginning of the last movement of the composer's next symphony, his serene *Symphony No. 5*, first performed in 1943. It is music which conveys a sense of final resolution of the crisis. The chorus sings of the dawn of an era of peace and justice, taking up the string melody, which forms the basis – though transformed in key and mood – of much of the music of the concluding section. As optimism grows, a key change from E Flat to C Major heralds music which is bright and spring-like, at the words: "Open to me the gates of righteousness". There are further key changes, the pace continues to quicken, and a majestic climax is reached when the chorus sings, *fortissimo*: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men", to "an accompaniment of bells and other emanations of rejoicing". [9] At the end there is a masterstroke. The chorus's joyful, confident singing of the words: "good-will toward men" is interrupted by the soprano's reiteration of the plea for peace. The chorus then joins in, singing very softly, their voices, and that of the soprano, dying away to nothing after the repeated word "pacem". We hope for peace, peace has been promised, but the yearned for circumstance has been described in the future tense, it is not yet the reality that exists.

How right Vaughan Williams was to conclude his cantata in this stark manner! Events of recent years on the world's stage, such as the war in Iraq, the continuing chaos and violence there, the endless killings in Israel-Palestine, the massacres in central Africa, make the plea for peace, which lies at the heart of Vaughan Williams's cantata, sadly as relevant today as at the time of its composition in 1936. But at least this tragic situation has probably given lovers of Vaughan Williams's music more opportunities to hear live performances of *Dona Nobis Pacem*, as choral societies and concert promoters have appreciated its topicality and re-discovered its fine musical qualities.

NOTES:

1. Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1980), 100
2. Quoted in Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 102.
3. Quoted in Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 31.
4. Quoted in Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, 78.
5. Quoted in Michael Kennedy, *Works*, 39.
6. Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams*: A Study (London: Harrap & Co.,1950), 44.
7. Here are some thoughts on the terminology in Whitman's poem, but these are open to correction by literary and philosophical experts! The "soul" may perhaps be viewed as the moving spirit of the living person, or the living person in terms of his or her spiritual and creative powers. The "I" is the bodily self who both provokes the creative self and seeks inspiration from it. Together, as "we", they constitute individual identity, able to embark on the journey.
8. Compare the passage beginning at figure 24 in *Dona Nobis Pacem* with the one beginning two bars after figure 28 in the Epilogue of Bax's *Seventh Symphony*. There are striking parallels in note pattern, harmony and scoring. Common to both works here is a recurrent series of descending chords beneath a high note sustained by violins (playing octave triplets in Vaughan Williams). The harp is prominent in both passages, either playing the descending chords (in Vaughan Williams and five after figure 30 in Bax), or joining the violins in sustaining the high note through ascending and descending octave quavers (two after figure 28 in Bax).
9. Michael Kennedy, *Works*, 272. St Luke's famous words were also set, in a not dissimilar, and equally memorable, manner by Gerald Finzi in his Christmas cantata of 1954, *In Terra Pax*.

Walt Whitman

(1819-1892)

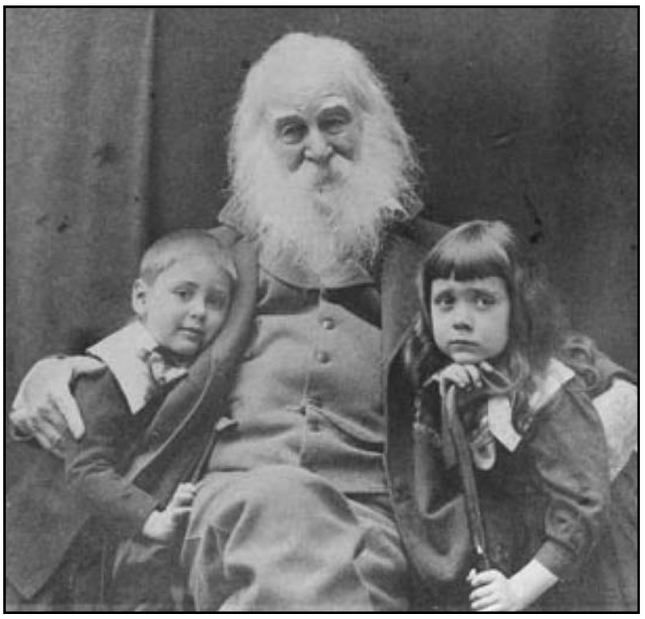
Darest thou now O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?

No map there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.

I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land.

Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.

Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil O soul.



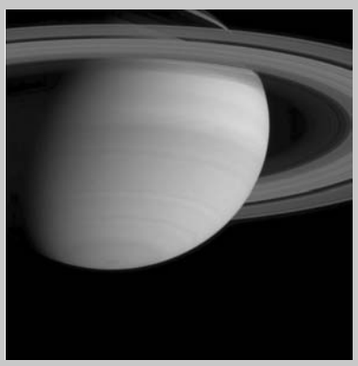
Whitman in 1887

Whispers of heavenly death, murmur'd I hear;
Labial gossip of night—sibilant chorals;
Footsteps gently ascending—mystical breezes, wafted soft and low;
Ripples of unseen rivers—tides of a current, flowing, forever flowing;
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of human tears?)

I see, just see, skyward, great cloud-masses;
Mournfully, slowly they roll, silently swelling and mixing;
With, at times, a half-dimm'd, sadden'd, far-off star,
Appearing and disappearing.

(Some parturition, rather—some solemn, immortal birth:
On the frontiers, to eyes impenetrable,
Some Soul is passing over.)

Walt Whitman first published his collection of poems under the title *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, but successive editions appeared over almost forty years. New poems were added with each edition, and, more rarely, others removed. Speaking of Whitman to Michael Kennedy in the last month of his life, Vaughan Williams said "I've never got over him, I'm glad to say." He used the poem *Darest thou now O soul* as the text for *Toward the Unknown Region*, first heard in Leeds in 1907; *Nocturne*, a setting of *Whispers of heavenly death*, dates from the beginning of 1908; and of course the *Sea Symphony*, his most extensive setting of Whitman's poetry, was composed between 1903 and 1909. Vaughan Williams did not set *When I heard the learn'd astronomer*, but it is presented below as an example of Whitman in his most directly affecting and concise vein.



When I heard the learn'd astronomer,

When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,

When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,

When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,

How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,

Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,

In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Simona Pakenham

. . . On FINZI

In his review in the last issue of the *RVW Society Journal* of Diana McVeagh's biography of Gerald Finzi, Rob Furneaux had this to say:

Intriguingly, Vaughan Williams had put forward Simona Pakenham as Finzi's first biographer…so delighted was he with her study of him (which still remains one of the most stimulating RVW books almost fifty years on...)

Just as intriguingly, Simona Pakenham had not been aware of this, and was surprised to learn of it from the Journal! Here, in a piece written specially for us, she shares her memories of Finzi.

The Italian-looking chap

In 1947 my husband, Noel Iliff, a drama producer at the BBC, was asked to choose a Shakespeare play for Saturday Night Theatre, reduce it to an hour and a half and commission a composer to provide the music. I was given the job of adaptation and, as a bonus, the choice of composer I was half way through the lengthy process of writing my RVW book and my mind instantly flew to the great man. We were doubtful that he would accept.

Before the BBC had time to make an approach I went, as I often did, to a lunchtime concert at the National Gallery where I chanced to hear a song-cycle – *Dies Natalis* – by somebody I had never heard of – Gerald Finzi. During the Introduction, before the soloist, Eric Greene, had even opened his mouth, I knew that this Finzi, if he were alive, rather than Vaughan Williams, was the natural-born composer for *Love's Labours Lost*, the play we had chosen. It turned out that he was alive because he took a bow, to enthusiastic applause, at the end of the work. I rushed to the BBC and told Noel to cancel, if not too late, the request to RVW.

I have totally forgotten the process by which they persuaded Gerald to agree to the commission and I did not meet him for some weeks. Before that I had emerged from a concert to find all my joints seized up and upon getting home and undressing discovered large purple blotches distributed all over me. A doctor was summoned and I shortly found myself in a huge bed in a nursing home in the Cromwell Road diagnosed with rheumatic fever. I was told I could not put my foot to the ground until my temperature had been normal for a week.

At least I had the adaptation of *Love's Labours Lost* to keep me from despair, but I could not go far with it unless I had some conversation with the composer. Having seen him briefly at the National Gallery I was prepared for the Italian-looking chap with the shock of black curls. He seemed unfazed by the situation and we found we had marked all the same places in our copies of Shakespeare. He visited me several times and so enchanted my nurse that she did not chase him off when he sat on the bed.

It was two months before I was allowed to out of bed and my legs would not support me. As soon as I could reliably stand, Joy Finzi invited Noel and me to Ashmansworth. My most vivid memory of that visit was of waking up to the smell of roasting coffee beans. Kiffer and Nigel were there – medium-sized boys. I remarked on their beauty to Joy. "Yes, and don't they know it!" she said.

I did not breathe a word about my book in progress. Since I never expected even to send it to a publisher I had kept it secret from everyone but Noel, so I cannot remember what prompted Gerald to declare "The opinions of the ordinary listener are of no interest to any musician!" My heart took a dive and I went home with the intention of putting my manuscript on the bonfire. It was Noel who dissuaded me. Then, years later, when RVW had (almost) admitted to enjoying my book about him, I told him of this remark. "Typical Gerald!" was his reply.

I had made the perfect choice of composer and the production was enchanting – but radio gets little notice from the press and it vanished almost without trace. Eventually a suite was made of the music, but without the voices of the actors it loses its character. I long for Stratford-on-Avon to stage a proper production.

What, I wonder, would RVW have made of it had I never discovered Gerald Finzi?

. . . and on WHITMAN

The scheme of the *Sea Symphony* faithfully follows that of the classical symphony until its final movement. This is entitled *The Explorers* and is of such length and magnitude that it seems to overbalance the work. Although the composer does not call any part of it an Epilogue, perhaps the second half of the movement might be considered to fulfil that purpose. If so it is the first example of what later became his invariable practice, of rounding off his symphonies with a movement that unifies all four into an indissoluble whole. All the same I cannot help wishing that he had amputated some of the last half of *The Explorers* where his poet, Whitman, seems to get much the best of the bargain. In the early days of the century Walt Whitman came to rival Housman as a poet for setting to music, drawing from Vaughan Williams's *Toward the Unknown Region* as well as this symphony and a setting of the *Dirge for Two Veterans* that was, years later, incorporated into the cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem*. "Whitmania", as the critic Sydney Grew, who suffered it in *extremis* called it, struck such diverse characters as Holst and Delius. His words gave Delius the inspiration for *Sea Drift*, and Holst's *Ode to Death* is, perhaps, the loveliest music he ever composed. (*Ralph Vaughan Williams, A Discovery of his Music*, London, 1957, pp 41-42)

The symphony sounds as if it were about to end shortly after, where, in an emphatic climax, the chorus sing "The true Son of God shall come singing his songs." But far from being the end of the symphony, this is the beginning of something quite new. The chorus settle in their seats, the orchestra plays an animated *obligato*, and the soloists leap to their feet – the soprano, who has not sung since the first movement, and the baritone, silent since the second, with the words "O we can wait no longer, We too take ship, O Soul" and the music, which from that point we expect to rise to a climax even greater, begins to slacken its vigour and fall apart into a looser texture. Whitman asserts himself. Not many of us in the 1950's are afflicted with "Whitmania" and we find it difficult to share in the enthusiasm that sent the musicians of 1910 rushing to his poetry for their inspiration. It is possible that I might find myself enjoying the end of this symphony more wholeheartedly if only the soloists could be inaudible, but they seem to achieve an audibility unusual in English concert halls at this point in the score, and I simply cannot "take" their habit of addressing each other as "O Soul". "O Soul, though pleasest me, I thee" declares the baritone; and surely the line "thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O Soul" is every bit as bad as the goal-keeper lines of Housman Vaughan Williams so scrupulously refrained from "perpetuating". (*ibid.*, p 46)

The Pilgrim's Progress in California

Introduced by ALAN THAYER, founder and Artistic Director,

TRINITY LYRIC OPERA

Jason Detwiler plays Pilgrim

I'll never forget my first meeting with Irene Dalis, General Director of Opera San Jose here in California. I had made an appointment weeks before to become acquainted with her as a colleague, and wanting at the same time to learn something about how an opera company is run. Of course, she was quite good at that, having been at the helm of OSJ for nearly three decades, through thick and thin. As she strode into the lobby to greet me for the first time, the first thing out of her mouth was "Well, I think we should have our heads examined, don't you?" That broke the ice and led to a friendship that continues to be a great encouragement to me on the remarkable path we have embarked upon in the founding of Trinity Lyric Opera.

Almost four hundred years ago, in Bedfordshire, England, John Bunyan had a dream in which he saw a man with a terrible burden on his back. And though he was delivered of that burden, he saw that same Pilgrim pass through the Slough of Despond, the Valley of Humiliation, his fight with Apollyon, then Vanity Fair, only to be thrown into prison, finally to be engulfed by deep waters, yet to arrive victoriously at the gates of the Celestial City. The lessons he learned along the way serve as examples and reminders four hundred years later to every reader of his great classic.

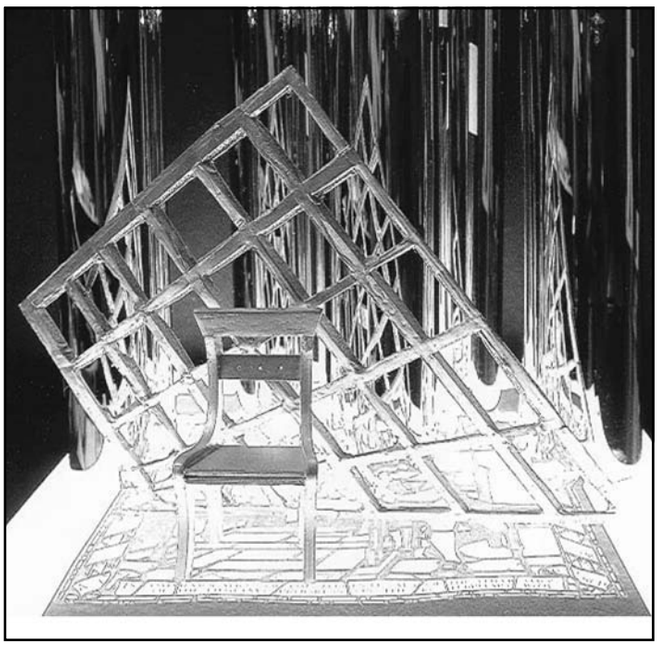
English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams also had a dream, and it took forty long years for his dream to become reality when London first heard his great masterpiece in April of 1951. The message of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* had charmed his heart and stirred his soul since he first began sketches before World War 1 of what was to become his great "Morality," the fifth opera he was to write, the master choral composer at the apogee of his creative genius. In it, over the span of forty years, he married Bunyan's text to music that is at once rapturous, compelling, noble and yet accessible, a language understood by all, a masterpiece *sans pareil*. Vaughan Williams's fans know that he seamlessly incorporated sections written decades before its première as stand-alone pieces, somehow anticipating their rightful place in the complete opera, or *morality*, as he preferred to call it, years later. He even wrote an entr'acte on the train from Dorking during rehearsals, realizing that he needed just a little more music to provide a perfect transition. After it was dropped from the repertoire at Covent Garden, the work rose from the ashes three years later in a splendid production at Cambridge, a production so compelling that it launched the musical career of a young geography student by the name of John Noble, whose performance indeed so nobly portrayed the Pilgrim that he abandoned his college science studies in favor of a life-long career in music, urged on by a letter from Vaughan Williams himself. That college production, staged in a university hall, encompassing great depth in its interpretation, vindicated the composer's forty long years of work as in a dream.

The Founder of Trinity Lyric Opera also had a dream: his was to bring this great work to audiences in the San Francisco Bay area for the very first time in a production that would have greatly pleased Vaughan Williams himself. After four years of patient planning, thinking and much time spent in prayer, Trinity Lyric Opera was incorporated as a 501(c)3 California Public Benefit Corporation, with Federal and State tax exemption status. This was the largest hoop through which I knew I had to jump, and once that major hurdle was cleared in the unheard-of time of just one month after the filing of our incorporation papers, I knew this production was meant to be. Our Board of Directors convened, and the search was on for the perfect cast and staff to stage what was to be in fact the U.S. West Coast première of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, while keeping its sights on further presentations in the future. It has been entirely a walk of faith, but as our new production began to take shape, we knew we were on to something that had taken on a life of its own.

Somehow, most of my life had centered around music; my Dad was a skilled surgeon and physician but his first love was music, and he played a number of instruments. While growing up I was fascinated with the latest instrument he had taken up, the oboe, as one of the local orchestras desperately needed an oboe player. I then received initial lessons, and have continued playing oboe and then English horn up to the present day. My Dad also had two heroes in his life: Napoleon and Wagner, and consequently, with his membership in the RCA Victor Record of the Month Club, there was a new record in the house each month for me to listen to and dissect, including, you guessed it, recordings of many Wagner operas. I took opera workshop in College, sang Goro in *Madame Butterfly*, danced in *The Bartered Bride*, sang with the Oakland Symphony Chorus in a splendid performance of *Dona Nobis Pacem*, and by this time I had become acquainted with his *Bunyan Sequence* and the complete *The Pilgrim's Progress* through the nationally broadcast "Sacred Concert Hall" program that I hosted for ten years on the radio network with which I have worked for the past 26 years. By this time, I had finally concluded that this was the most undeservedly underplayed work on the planet, and that this deplorable situation needed to be remedied. No other opera company in the San Francisco Bay area would even touch the piece, because after all, the soprano doesn't die or wear a horned helmet, there are no love duets, no sword duels or mistaken identities. But as Vaughan Williams himself said, this was the opera that he wanted to write. It was at this time four years ago that I decided that something had to be done about this.

The Dean Lesher Regional Centre for the Arts

After our incorporation in 2004, the learning curve was steep and arduous, but the amazing thing is that door after door was flung wide open. It has been rightfully said that one of the secrets to success is that you surround yourself with the best. And that we have done. We are now almost fully cast with artists singing roles that are perfectly suited to their particular talents. We have a phenomenal set designer, who has come up with a stunning concept, and who has also become a personal friend and mentor, one of the best lighting designers on the West Coast, and a gorgeous hall to perform the work in, located in Walnut Creek, California... and the hall was available during the particular week we wanted! We also built a first-class website, which I hope you will visit, www.trinitylyricopera.org



Set design for the Prison scene

However, forming a new opera chorus has been daunting, and quite simply, a dreadful challenge. We had held auditions last July for chorus members and the remaining principal parts that had not yet been cast, and since we are new, and have no proven track record, attendance was, well, disappointing. After getting word around through some of the larger singing organisations and choruses in the area, the higher parts were filled relatively quickly, but the lower voices have remained a challenge to fill. However, it is encouraging that almost every week, we receive a note from someone who has heard about us and is interested in singing with us, so members are still trickling in.

I must mention too that one of the most gratifying things that has resulted from founding Trinity Lyric Opera has been the wonderful correspondence friendship that has sprung up on the other side of the Pond, with John Noble who is still singing! Also with various Directors of the RVW Society and with Mrs. RVW herself, through her personal secretary.

The toughest challenge remains the funding issues which are rearing their ugly head, but as I trust that this company was formed to perform Vaughan Williams' greatest composition, it will be around for a long time to come, the Lord willing, to perform other works that deserve a wider hearing. Any suggestions for sources of funding would be greatly appreciated! If you are not able to attend our performances of *The Pilgrim's Progress* June 16, 17 and 18 in the San Francisco Bay Area, you might wish to help our Company with a gift toward its support. And with my deepest of thanks!

Yes, maybe I should have my head examined, but I'll cherish the experiences I have enjoyed through my work with Trinity Lyric Opera the rest of my life. My heart is humbled and grateful for the countless expressions of support from well-wishers and the many greatly talented artists working with us on our first production, as well as for the personal friendships that have been forged in collaboration with the many involved on the pilgrim path here below leading to our inaugural performances this coming June. Dreams can come true... they did for John Bunyan, as his pilgrimage ended in the Celestial City; they did for Vaughan Williams, with music that lives on in the hearts of countless devotees almost fifty years after his death; and they did for the Founder of Trinity Lyric Opera with the birth of a new opera company in the greater Bay Area. My hope is that the music and the message of this stunning opera will fill many hearts and stir many souls long after the strains of the hymn-tune "York" have faded away into memory.

RVW, Email and the Internet

Thanks are due to those members who responded positively to the request in the last issue to provide email addresses. A reminder that email is a cheap and convenient way of communicating and the Society invites members to pass their email address on to the Secretary, David Betts, whose contact details are to be found on the front page. All information pertaining to members is of course held in strict confidence and is used only by the Society.

And another reminder, the Society's website. Type "Vaughan Williams" into the best known internet search engine and our site is the first result to come up. It is a high quality site with features far too numerous to mention here. Members are urged to visit and see for themselves.

www.rvwsociety.com

Heirs and Rebels

by Em Marshall

I am very grateful for Vaughan Williams. Not only for improving the quality of my life with his wonderful music – which he has assuredly done – but also because he is one of the composers I can gleefully hold up as an example of a seemingly "pastoral" British composer who also wrote some of the most deeply chilling, dramatic and UN-pastoral music ever, when I all-too frequently encounter the criticism that all English music of the early twentieth century is "cow-pat". Another composer I turn for vindication and to rescue the name of English music of this period is that of his friend Gustav Holst. Holst's writing, like VW's, is utterly distinctive and immediately recognisable, and he reflects his friend in his wide range of output, travelling the length and breadth of pastorality (the *Cotswolds Symphony, Hampshire Suite* and *Somerset Rhapsody*), tremendous energy and dramaticism (*Planets* and *Hammersmith*), stark bleakness (*Egdon Heath*) through to lush, rich romanticism (*King Estmere and Indra*). Holst's music is characterised by energetic driving rhythms, colourful and brilliant orchestration, a masterful grasp of writing for voice, a predisposition for the exotic (as in his oriental suite, *Beni Mora*, but more so works setting Indian texts), an excellent choice of texts for choral works, and depth and profundity. His is music that gets one on both the intellectual and the emotional plane - highly accomplished composition, well articulated, but that has an overpoweringly passionate force that both intrigues and disquiets, thrills and strikes right to the soul. Whilst *The Planets* is without question one of this country's greatest orchestral works, it is also one whose fame deeply disturbed the composer, whose uncertainty - one need not go so far as to say dislike - of the piece increased along with the work's burgeoning reputation. Holst's was a reasonably sized output, however, and his concerns were justified in that his unease foreshadowed the way in which his other works - some of them equally great - were to be neglected in favour of *The Planets*, and consequently many of them but hardly known or heard.

Holst wrote everything from songs to operas, overtures to symphonies, solo piano works to ballets. While some of these works inhabit the same world as Vaughan Williams, the persuasive influence of Indian thought brings a flavour slightly alien to Vaughan Williams' very English-rooted works, and an added dimension. However, even these "Indian works" are in a vein that a Vaughan Williams-lover would surely appreciate.

The first time I ever saw *Savitri* it was twinned with Vaughan Williams' wonderful *Riders from the Sea*, and in fact these pieces have much in common in their dramaticism and unadulterated power. Holst taught himself Sanskrit in his mid-twenties and translated Sanskrit texts himself for his own settings, finding the current translations rather stilted. *Savitri* is an episode from the great Sanskrit spiritual classic *The Mahabharata*, and is a tale of love conquering death. It opens with one of the most chilling and dramatic phrases known to opera, as Death calls to Savitri from offstage - "Savitri! Savitri! I am Death!", and Savitri realises that Death has come for her beloved husband, Satyavan. She tricks Death by means of her fidelity to Satyavan, and Death is forced to give up the soul he has come to claim. The music is at once simple, and yet remarkably effective – haunting, eloquent, evocative, intense – and contains passages of extreme lyrical beauty – such as Savitri's arias "I am with thee, My arms are round thee" and "Loneliness and pain are ended; Waken once more to home and wife", or her heart-rending, tender welcoming of Death "Welcome Lord!", as well some moments of abject terror, as in Savitri's realisation "Ah! All fades! Death is at my heart!" Few works can rival this opera for its ability to move – *Tristan*, perhaps, or *Peter Grimes*. But there is, to my mind, no denying that it is one of the greatest operas Britain has produced.

Savitri is probably the most proficient of all of Holst's Indian works, but I would also recommend any of the others without any hesitation – *The Cloud Messenger* and *Two Eastern Pictures* (the text of both by the first century BC mystical poet Kalsidas), *Indra* and the *Hymns from the Rig Veda*.

If, however, opera, or impassioned settings of Sanskrit texts aren't really your thing and you prefer the *Norfolk Rhapsodies*, the *Tallis Fantasia* or *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus to Riders to the Sea*, try Holst's *Cotswolds Symphony*, written between 1899 and 1900, a time when he was enjoying country walks with VW. The symphony opens with a brief and unpretentious first movement, reminiscent of folksong - tending unconsciously in its direction despite Holst's not having properly "discovered" folksong by that time. The second movement is the slow *Elegy in memoriam William Morris*, a man Holst greatly admired – he had heard Morris lecture and was drawn to his socialist ideas. This intense and passionate movement is better known as a piece in its own right, pulled out of the symphony and edited by Colin Matthews, although I far prefer to hear it in "context" as the focal point of the symphony. The ensuing playful Scherzo perhaps portrays a village fair, and the work concludes with an alluring and confident Finale. This is not Holst's best music, but it is certainly worth hearing as an example of his more pastoral side, alongside the *Somerset Rhapsody* and *Hampshire Suites* (both based on folksongs from the counties) and *Egdon Heath*.

Holst is as at home with large-scale choral works as he is solo song or orchestral suites, and the *Choral Fantasia* and *First Choral Symphony* are good examples of this. If you like *Oxford Elegy*, *Towards the Unknown Region or Sancta Civitas* you may well enjoy these works too. Indeed, Vaughan Williams said, after an unfavourable critical reception to the *Choral Fantasia's* first performance at Gloucester Cathedral in 1931 (it was slightly too esoteric and avant-garde for the critics' liking): "I played through the Fantasia again yesterday and it is most beautiful – I know you don't care, but I just want to tell the press (and especially ****) that they are misbegotten abortions"! Both the *Choral Fantasia* and *First Choral Symphony* are works wherein great poems are skilfully set to impressive music – dramatic, mysterious and thrilling, resulting in masterly works of tremendous conviction and power. The *First Choral Symphony* is an amalgamation of settings of poems by Keats, ranging from the Ode on a *Grecian Urn* to extracts from *Endymion*, while the *Choral Fantasia*, with its stunning organ opening, sets words by Holst's friend Robert Bridges.

Many other Holst works are comparable to Vaughan Williams' – similarities can be drawn between the austerity and desolation of *Egdon Heath* and the final movement of Vaughan Williams' sixth symphony, between *Sir John in Love* and Holst's *At the Boar's Head* (with a libretto chosen by Holst primarily from Shakespeare's Henry IV, but also using 2 sonnets (XIX and XII, sung by Prince Hal) and three traditional songs) or The Wandering Scholar, and between the *Poisoned Kiss* and Holst's comic opera *The Perfect Fool* or even his comic ballet *The Golden Goose.* Even more similar are their folksong settings, their choral works such as

Vaughan Williams' *Valiant for Truth* and *O Taste and See* and *Holst's The Evening Watch*, numerous part-songs and songs from Tennyson's *The Princess*, not to mention Holst and Vaughan Williams' works for wind band. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that they remained friends from their first student meeting at the RCM in 1895 until Holst's death in 1934, and that throughout their lives they consulted, taught, constructively criticised, and helped each other's compositions, working and corresponding intimately, as well as enjoying leisure time together on their walking holidays. Vaughan Williams spoke of "cribbing from" Holst, and in 1906, following the receipt of Holst's *Two songs without Words*, dedicated to Vaughan Williams, he wrote to his friend: "I don't know what you owe to me – but I know all I owe to you – if I ever do anything worth doing it will be greatly owing to having such a friend as you "at my command" as the folk-songs say, always ready to help and advise – and someone whose yea is always yea and nay, nay – which is a quality one really wants in a friend and so seldom gets."

It was clearly a truly great, and immensely mutually beneficial, friendship, and it is sobering to realise the influence they had on each other – and that without the other, neither may have grown as great as he did.

MUSIC YOU MIGHT LIKE

Rob Furneaux on Bernard Herrmann

Bernard Herrmann

A sexy looking blonde steps gingerly into the shower sliding her gown to the floor over her voluptuous curves. She turns on the water. Moments later a figure enters with a knife. No this isn't an attempt to get the RVW Society Journal onto the top shelf of your local newsagent, it's a description of one of the most frightening moments in any Hitchcock film: the shower scene from *Psycho*. Accompanying it, the most well known piece of film music ever written: high pitched screeching violins, their bows slashing downwards like Norman Bates' knife.

The composer of those notes was Bernard Herrmann. Although he was born in New York in 1911, he was a life-long enthusiast for European and British Music. He championed the music of Bartók in America when he was practically unknown. He was very fond of the music of British composers including Walton, Arthur Benjamin, and of course Vaughan Williams. Indeed, his astute sense of 'atmosphere' in music gained from years of experience in film score writing led him to comment that some of the deleted passages of Vaughan Williams' original version of *London Symphony* were its most original and haunting. Richard Hickox' recording has shown us how prophetic Herrmann's words were.

Herrmann remained a frustrated 'serious' composer all his life. His early successes in writing music for *Citizen Kane* and *The Devil and Daniel Webster* drew him into the world of films – a direction he didn't want to go in. He essentially saw films as a stop gap, a financial cushion while he established himself as a serious composer and conductor. Sadly this was not to be. In constant demand by the movie industry, his time for writing serious works ebbed away. That said, he composed a symphony, a cantata, and an opera. All these do not deserve the total obscurity into which they have fallen.

The work of Herrmann's classical output which has most impressed me is *The Fantasticks*. This is a song cycle using the words of the English writer Nicolas Breton (1545–1626). Breton describes the early part of the year with verses for January, February, March, April and May. Herrmann's superb setting begins with a bass bewailing the rigours of January. March is a sprightly yet vicious scherzo reflecting the month's capricious character. Ultimately the score opens out to May, where choir and orchestra luxuriate in Breton's simple yet poignant words.

Herrmann's symphony in particular is a considerable achievement. It contains music of considerable breadth, from Waltonesque savagery in the opening movement to an elegiac third movement reminiscent of Barber at his best. To me the symphony sounds like an opening gambit, a 'finding one's feet' symphony presaging even greater things to come. But it didn't happen this way: haunted by the world of serious music's lack of recognition he reverted back to the music he knew others appreciated.

In a long association with Alfred Hitchcock Herrmann produced some of his most stunning film scores. Shunning the syrupy string-laden romanticism of earlier film composers like Tiomkin and Steiner, Herrmann produced scores of startling originality with orchestrations which would put many a "serious" composer's output to shame. His scores were constructed using 20th-century classical techniques, with forms as diverse as passacaglia, and even atonalism. Howard Goodall in his recent Channel Four series about 20th-century composers illustrated just how impressive Herrmann's composing techniques were.

I look at Herrmann's major film scores in the same light as I would any of the 20th century's major composers' output. Noteworthy examples are *Vertigo*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *North By Northwest* - with its acrobatically orchestrated theme which once in the head 'won't leave off' - and, of course, *Psycho*. The music for *Psycho* was later re-worked into a suite for strings which compares more than favourably with string works by Martinu, Bliss and others.

These film scores were widely heard in the 1940's, 50's and 60's. There's little doubt that music of such quality impressed many a serious composer. Of course to "own up" and admit that your music was influenced by a mere film composer might not seem appropriate, so we don't know how many composers listened to Herrmann's exciting and polished scores and learnt a lesson or two. An individual to put his head above the parapet was the Estonian symphonist Eduard Tubin who

frankly admitted that he learnt a great deal about giving his music incisive momentum from listening to the scores of Herrmann and was greatly influenced by him.

And what of Herrmann's later years? In the mid 1960's film music began to be invaded by "trendy" music. Guitars and bongo drums infiltrated the territory of the symphony orchestra. Although Herrmann's prodigious talent was well capable of producing music of almost any style (as evidenced by the oily appeal of his jazzy, saxophone-laden score for the film *Taxi Driver*) he refused to acquiesce. When Hitchcock asked for a score for his film *Torn Curtain* requesting a more modern approach, Herrmann produced a score using traditional orchestral resources – another of his masterpieces. Hitchcock would have none of it. He interrupted the recording session and railed at Herrmann in front of members of the orchestra. They never worked together again.

Disillusioned with the Hollywood scene, Herrmann retreated to the land whose music he loved – Britain. During his last years he conducted recordings of his 'serious' music including the Symphony and the Fantasticks. These are still available on disc.

"How is it," asks Howard Goodall, "that a composer of such talent and influence should be mentioned in 'Grove' with only a few lines while other obscure baroque and Eastern European composers located alongside him illicit lengthy entries?" Surely the word here is snobbery. The film music of Vaughan Williams is only now beginning to establish itself as an important element of his output. So it's about time for the acknowledgement of Herrmann.

I hope I've persuaded you that the music of Bernard Herrmann does not warrant such obscurity. If I haven't managed to persuade you, beware! Next time you take a shower, watch out for the dark figure of a man wearing his mother's dress and clutching aloft a bread knife. It'll be me!

Recommended listening:

Symphony and *The Fantasticks*: Unicorn UKCD 2063. National Philharmonic conducted by Herrmann

Music for *North By Northwest* : Unicorn UKCD 2040. London Studio Orchestra conducted by Laurie Johnson

Film Scores, including *Psycho*: Milan Records. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Elmer Bernstein

Moby Dick – Cantata for male chorus, soloists and orchestra. *For the Fallen*: Unicorn UKCD 2061. National Philharmonic conducted by Herrmann

The latest member to share his "Desert Island list" with us is Stuart Fairbrother

I am a RVW Society member living in Germany, only an hour's drive from the beautiful city of Cologne, with its magnificent cathedral. From June to September one can attend organ recitals, which is one reason for including *A Vision of Aeroplanes* in my list. If any members have any comments on my list I'd be very interested to hear them.

A *London Symphony*, original version

For me, listening to this superb symphony excellently conducted by Richard Hickox is very nostalgic, especially the second movement, which is my favourite. I can listen for hours and never tire of it.

The Lark Ascending

This work is most moving played by Tasmin Little. Whenever I am in the countryside and feeling sad I listen to it on my portable CD player When the music has finished I always feel happier and glad to be alive.

Charterhouse Suite for strings.

A work that one only hears on a CD. It is a great pity that this neglected and beautiful piece of music is not played more often, at the Proms, for example.

A Song of Thanksgiving.

Another neglected piece of music. I have the recording on Hyperion, superbly sung by the Corydon Singers conducted by Matthew Best.

Six Teaching Pieces for piano

These pieces were composed in 1934. I have these and *The Lake in the Mountains* on a discontinued cassette of the complete Vaughan Williams piano music played by Peter Jacobs. They are jolly pieces and I am looking forward to some well-known pianist recording them in the future.

Hodie

I have the EMI version coupled with the Fantasia on Christmas Carols. Another jolly piece, full of vitality.

A Sea Symphony

I have heard several recordings of this wonderful music, but my favourite is of Isobel Baillie and John Cameron with Boult on an old LP. I was fortunate to find this same performance on CD, but I still have the LP for sentimental reasons. Isobel Baillie's voice in the first movement is breathtaking.

The Sons of Light

Another excellent piece of music, rather an unusual work which, when I first heard it, did not sound like Vaughan Williams to me. I have this on LP too, and am very pleased to learn of the new Naxos CD version.

Linden Lea

There are numerous versions of this famous song, my favourite is the arrangement for chorus and orchestra. I begin the day by listening to this song when the weather is dull and wet and it cheers me up.

A Vision of Aeroplanes

The organ is my favourite instrument and to hear the organ introduction of this beautiful piece of music is wonderful, before the choir's entry.

Karen-Lisa Fletcher shares a tribute to her Father

It was with sadness that I lost my father and musical mentor, Ray, in August 2004, after an 8-year battle with cancer.

His passion for music seemed to consume him to the point of exclusion of almost everything else and my first memories were of Radio 3 as a constant companion, whilst he went on to amass a huge music collection across all formats and enjoyed 50 years of London concert-going – on one occasion sitting behind Vaughan Williams himself, whom he recognised by his mop of white hair and earpiece!

It was fitting therefore that music should play a major part at Ray's funeral and we sang *Linden Lea* on entering the crematorium. Amongst the other pieces that I chose was the opening of 'The Explorers' from the *Sea Symphony*, a fitting farewell if such a thing as a soul exists and another of Vaughan Williams' inspired creations.

As further tributes, the London Symphony Orchestra were kind enough to accept a dedication in their programme of the *Sea Symphony* at a concert I attended recently, and our family has decided to dedicate a seat in his name at the newly refurbished Royal Festival Hall, due to re-open in 2007. In this way, something positive lives on.

I would urge all members to consider creative dedications and legacies of this nature. My loss has made me consider my own will and I have decided to leave something to several of our national orchestras and also to an independent record label. Don't forget that there are many regional and local orchestras, choirs and groups as well as clubs, societies and festivals which could also benefit from your generosity and in this way we can all make a contribution towards the continuity of our musical heritage.

My cousin, the poet John Greening, wrote the following poem for my father. I would like to share it with other members of the Society.

(John Francis, RVW Society Treasurer, writes: Members are encouraged to leave a legacy to the RVW Society, whether in money, or of any Vaughan Williams memorabilia that they may have. At the moment we are marshalling our resources to promote recordings, but in the future the opening of a museum could be a (more expensive!) possibility. Any legacy left to the Society will be tax free, since we are a charity. Do feel free to contact me at john@lffuk.com if you would like to discuss suitable wording for a bequest.)

A new release for Ray

As if we'd never left the Festival Hall's
front stalls and that conductor (who *was* it, Ray?)

had never raised his arms for *Also sprach...*
as if no time had come between, the beat

of years had never started, the trumpeter
not played, you my age now, and I a boy...

today, an Odyssey begins, and we
can only try to have your themes and tunes

recorded lovingly, make you the Best
Available Version, the Critics' Choice,

replay your life, Ray, in High Definition
through the latest Mission multi-channel:

The Story of a Man. Bring on Karajan
and the Berlin Phil! You would as happily

have pottered down the diamond mine of your
LPs and put on *Swingin' Safari*,

but African Sanctus cries its call to prayer
and begs a holy send-off from the past

to hymn you on your last safari, away
from war, from life insurance, from the heathen
roar of Boeings as they bargain for the sun –
though, Ray, they never reach that 'tent of stars'

the *Ode to Joy* can lift us to, when all
the men's voices strain to those savage heights

'where surely a beloved Father lives...'
Another time, up in the gods, do you

recall we heard the *Inextinguishable*
performed, as if their lives depended on it,

by Japanese, their war drums battling out
a duel to survive? At home now, Ray,

let drums begin, then wind, then brass: draw tight
those bows and hear the fletched ash fly from speakers

turned like Jodrell Bank towards the stars –
the opening bars of *Also sprach...*, the closing

chords of Nielsen's *Fourth*, or the Choral
Finale of Beethoven ablaze: you

the maestro, Ray, waving your arms and singing.

John Greening 15.8.04

In the first of a new series . . . following in the footsteps of RVW . . . Stephen Connock visits Haddo House in Aberdeenshire.

As the car sweeps into the long drive to Haddo House, 20 miles north of Aberdeen, the change in the landscape is startling. Gone are the bare windswept slopes of Aberdeenshire. Instead, there are oak, silver birch and – yes – rhododendrons. Vaughan Williams must have been struck by this reminder of Leith Hill Place when he visited the house in mid 1957. "My late husband's father was a keen gardener" explains June, Marchioness of Aberdeen, "he brought plants from everywhere".

This is June Gordon, Lady Haddo, who had married Major David Gordon in 1939. The Gordons had owned Haddo House for centuries and David had the estates conferred on him in 1945. The house dates from 1732 and was refurbished in 1880. Alongside the house there was added in the 1890s a large wooden shed, originally used for indoor tennis. This shed, built to a Canadian design, was subsequently found to have an almost perfect acoustic. June Gordon had trained at the Royal College of Music, and the family decided in 1945 to form a choral society and to perform concerts and operas in the "shed".

In 1947, distinguished soloists such as Elsie Suddaby and Eric Greene performed *Messiah*. Leon Goossens journeyed up to play the oboe part in *St Matthew Passion* in 1950 and *Gerontius* was performed in 1954. Britten conducted his *Spring Symphony* in 1960. The Haddo House experiment was - and still is - a notable success.

June Gordon had seen Vaughan Williams whilst a student at the RCM in the 1930s, but had been "too frightened" to talk to him. Now in 1957 he had accepted her invitation to conduct Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* and *A Sea Symphony* in that wonderful shed. The problem was that when he arrived for rehearsal he decided he did not want to conduct his *Sea Symphony*. June Gordon conducted it instead. This is one of her great musical memories. "It was nerve-wracking at first, with him in the audience, but he was so kind to me. He answered all my queries and the performance was a great success". The soloists were Jennifer Vyvyan and John Cameron.

Ralph and Ursula stayed in the State Room, the largest guest bedroom above the private quarter of the house. The views from the room, to the East, are superb. When not attending rehearsals, Ralph and Ursula went on the "Castle trail", visiting Tolquhon Castle nearby.

Sadly June did not see Vaughan Williams again, but Ursula became a close friend and often visited Haddo House. Whilst still in overall charge of musical events, June does not conduct any more. The Music Director is now Alice Dennis. Yet for June Gordon, Vaughan Williams' visit to Haddo House was very special. Today, almost 50 years later, she speaks of Vaughan Williams with warmth and deep affection for the man and his music.

(Stephen Connock visited Haddo House on 8 November 2005. The next *Footsteps* will feature Sheringham in North Norfolk)

RVW SOCIETY JOURNAL BINDER OFFER

Due to circumstances beyond the Society's control the RVW Society Journal Binder is temporarily unavailable. As soon as they become available again the usual announcement will appear in the Journal. We apologise to those members who have ordered binders and are awaiting delivery and ask for your patience as we try to rectify the situation.

Binder Offer, The RVW Society,
c/o 24 Birdcroft Road,
Welwyn Garden City,
Hertfordshire AL8 6EQ

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

RVW AND RELIGION

You challenge your readership to contribute views on the subject of Vaughan Williams and religion and are understandably disappointed when such views are subsequently they withheld from publication. It is perhaps understandable: the topic is subjective and there is often reservation (and especially so amongst the British) about declaring what is, after all, a glimpse into the soul.

After all, does anyone care about what one or another's individual take on the subject is? Would it be meaningful to anyone else? Would it illuminate the subject or merely illuminate the contributor? Perhaps not: but having been challenged I thought I would open my own thinking up even though it won't be likely to throw much more light on things.

I am an atheist. However, atheism for me presents its problems. Not philosophical problems: I've thought long and hard about the issue and continue to do so with, I hope, an open mind. No, the problem lies in the *consequences* of not actually believing in an external creative or guiding power. Because that means . . . we're all alone. Or rather, it means firstly that we came from nowhere and will go back there; and secondly that we're not here to fulfil any supernaturally-designed higher purpose.

But I wish I wasn't alone! I wish there was life after death and that I could live forever in the company of my loved ones. And I'd like to think that mankind could raise its game above war, conflict, seeking power as a means of coercion. And therein lies the germ of what one might call a spiritual dimension to life (or at least to mine). We're messing things up but it seems no one knows how to sort it out and in the face of such a state we either fall into despair or we seek meaning from somewhere.

And that is reflected for me in Vaughan Williams' music. *The Lark Ascending* exemplifies this best: the lark (representing the best of mankind) soaring free above an earthly world of clod-hopping stasis. Then there's the *Pastoral Symphony*, almost unbearably haunting in its sadness – and more importantly in its hope. The majestic *Fifth*: another paean to endeavour and hope itself. (The *Sixth* reminds we atheists to keep a sense of perspective: it all winds down eventually remember!). It therefore fits absolutely that Vaughan Williams's church music should be imbued with such fervour and passion: it fulfils the same purpose of faith, endeavour and hope through its *process* and well, if you're a believer, then the content helps as well.

Whether this is meaningful to anyone else I guess is open to question: but it works for me.

Tony Kitson
Combs, Suffolk, U.K.

PLUTO, AND OTHER THINGS

I have just received the October edition of the Journal, which as ever provides some thought-provoking, and to some of us, utterly incomprehensible material. (More on this later.)

I wholeheartedly agree with Em Marshall's tirade against the disfiguring of Holst's *The Planets* by the unwarranted intrusion of Colin Matthews' *Pluto*. If it is to be played as an additional item after *Neptune*, there should be a sufficient break to allow *Neptune* to fade away and indeed, the audience to applaud Holst's work, before the Matthews is played, thereby maintaining Holst's work as a self-contained masterpiece.

However, I fear Ms Marshall, however justified in her protest in walking out before *Pluto* got fully underway, is guilty of the same disruption to other listeners (some of whom may misguidedly have wished to listen to it) for which she quite rightly lambastes those who succumbed to the outbreak of collective bronchitis in the finale of Vaughan Williams' *6th*!

I also have some sympathy, as a non-musician, with Clive Elgar's problem in not being able to understand some of the more learned articles, but would point out that the Society exists to promote scholarship into Vaughan Williams' music, as well as more general information about concerts and recordings. There is surely room for the expert as well as the layman in the Society, particularly as one of the problems Vaughan Williams' music faced in the years after his death was that so-called musicologists tended to look down their noses at it in favour of trendier, and vastly inferior figures.

Finally, back to Ms Marshall! Much as I welcome the huge interest in the original version of the *London Symphony*, and cherish my CD, it does not and must not replace the 1936 version, even if the Chairman seems to wish otherwise, and I would deplore any suggestion that it should. After all, this was how Vaughan Williams wished it to be played, even if in so decreeing, he was depriving us of listening to some of his own music. Performances of the original must remain occasional, and I look forward to seeing notices for performances of the "usual" version.

In the case of *Pluto*, may it rest in peace!

Nigel Blore
Billericay, Essex, U.K.

SEE BRITAIN BY TRAIN

I would like to draw the attention of members of the RVW Society to the fact that the 1957 British Transport Films production of *The England of Elizabeth*, for which Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote the music, has recently been released on DVD in a two-disc set, under the general title *See Britain by Train*, issued by the British Film Institute (catalogue number BFIVD715). The commentary, by the historian A. L. Rowse, is spoken by the actor Alec Clunes. The colour picture quality is excellent, much improved from an earlier issue on video cassette. The accompanying insert booklet, incidentally, remarks that the film won three international film awards when it first appeared.

The British Transport Films Unit, headed by Edgar Anstey, had a distinguished track record (pun fully intended) in the post-war period, and some of the other films included in the current set had music by such figures as Elizabeth Lutyens, Humphrey Searle, Grace Williams and Spike Hughes, while the spoken commentaries feature actors Donald Houston, Bryden Murdoch, Stephen Murray and Robert Shaw, among others.

Further information can be obtained from the British Film Institute, 21, Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN, tel. 020 7957 4767, fax 020 7957 8968, email video.films@bfi.org.uk or the website www.bfi.org.uk/video.

Charles Long,
Leatherhead, Surrey, U.K.

(See reviews of these DVDs elsewhere in the Journal – Ed.)

VERNON HANDLEY

In reading the letter from Tony Williams in RVW Society Journal issue 34 I find myself in total agreement concerning the contribution Vernon Handley has made to supporting the work of composers from the British Isles. Not only has he programmed these works (including much Vaughan Williams) in live concerts but he has also been involved in a long list of recordings, which includes some superb performances of Vaughan Williams music. It must also be remembered that many of these wonderful recordings made over many years have been made with a smaller budget than some of the jet set conductors and so called "major"

labels would have considered possible. Let me echo Tony Williams call for Vernon Handley to be honoured by the Society.

Performances of music by Vernon Handley are made all the more interesting by his layout of the orchestra where he physically separates the first and second violins. This allows the music to move around the orchestra in a way not experienced with the current conventional placing used by most conductors. Why has this split of the first and second violins which was usual 80 years ago – note the period with respect to RVW – fallen out of favour?

Vernon Handley used this placement to superb affect in a concert given by the RPO at the Festival Hall London on Thursday the 25th February 1988. Handley's performance on this occasion of the RVW *London Symphony* could not have been bettered. Indeed this performance must rank as the most wonderful performance of any orchestral music it has ever been my pleasure to attend. The music built up in the slow introduction in such a mysterious and intense way, the like of which I have not heard at any performance since. The rest of the symphony was delivered in an equally captivating way with added interest produced by the orchestral placement which caused the music to bounce around the orchestra in a way not normally achieved by most conductors.

Ed Bullimore,
Haddenham, U.K.

May I endorse Mr. Tony Williams' letter from Dublin in the Journal for October 2005 in suggesting that Vernon Handley should receive an Honour. He has spent a lifetime in promoting British music, in particular that of Vaughan Williams and Elgar as well as many others, for which he has been continually overlooked.

Anthony M. Cutbush
Barnet, Herts., U.K.

THOSE TOP TENS AGAIN…

Thank you for printing Rob Furneaux's letter, including my choice of RVW's music. In fact there was one work missing from my original eight and if I were allowed ten works the list would read as follows: *Fifth Symphony* and *Sinfonia Antartica, Tallis Fantasia*, *An Oxford Elegy*, Sixth Symphony, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Old 100th* Psalm, the *Sea Symphony, In the Fen Country* and *The Lake* in the Mountains.

John Eldon
Sydenham, U.K.

FROM THE EDITOR

The life and work of Ralph Vaughan Williams is an inexhaustible subject and lucky are we to be exploring it. A glance over the list of themes addressed by the Journal over recent years is an indication of this richness, and there seems to be no shortage of ideas for other themes in the future. The last four issues have dealt with, successively, "Glorious John", religion, the concertos and Walt Whitman, and each has seen a different kind of response from Society members. Of these, it's fair to say that the subject of religion rumbles on, only one letter in this issue, but still numerous contacts from people not wanting their views published. And rather to my surprise, Whitman, though immensely important to Vaughan Williams, doesn't seem to interest our members very much!

For many members it is the *Pastoral Symphony*, of all Vaughan Williams' works, which means the most. The next issue of the Journal is devoted to this masterpiece, but after that, something a bit different. Many English composers of the twentieth century were only too happy to compose music for amateur performers, and many members will have experienced Vaughan Williams' music directly from performing it. Of these, a fair proportion will be members of amateur choirs, and with this in mind I would like to invite your contributions on the shorter choral works. Members are, as always, free to cover the subject however they wish, but I do hope that those of you who have sung – or conducted – this music, a repertoire of quite extraordinary variety and richness, will feel inspired to contribute.

William Hedley

Concert Reviews

The 9th in Birmingham

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by their Principal Conductor Sakari Oramo gave a concert on the 8th of November in Birmingham's Symphony Hall. The concert of four works included as the final item Vaughan Williams' *9th Symphony*, which is less frequently played than many of the symphonies. As far as I was concerned it was a "must hear" programme.

Symphony Hall, Birmingham is an acoustical environment which has been designed by acoustical engineers for its very good sound characteristics. Listening to music in this hall is a very different experience from listening to music in, say, the Barbican Hall in London. The latter is a hall – a space which always seems to me to be a void which was left between offices and rooms for which a use needed to be found, hence it's shape just happened because of the constraints of the site and the shape of the surrounding structures. (Someone will probably tell me that it did not happen like this at all). Symphony Hall, Birmingham on the other hand gives the impression of a purposely designed acoustical environment with curved edges to balconies rather than sharp corners and also surfaces and hall dimensions which avoid standing waves and hall resonances. The acoustical properties are even variable. The canopy above the orchestra can be raised or lowered to modify the acoustical characteristics and the performers' end of the hall is fitted with a large number of acoustical doors which can be positioned fully closed with hard surfaces to provide a maximum reverberation time, can be fully opened to minimize reverberation time or adjusted to any point in between.

For the concert the acoustical doors were in their normal position, about one third open, for the first two works (Elgar's *Cockaigne* and Foulds' *Dynamic Triptych*). During the interval these doors were opened fully to reduce the reverberation time and ensure clarity in the very fast and detailed orchestral writing of the scherzo of the Vaughan Williams. So far so good I thought!

This was also to be the first time I had heard Sakari Oramo conducting Vaughan Williams. His strengths had previously generally been best portrayed in Scandinavian and particularly Finnish works and I was very interested to hear an RVW work under his baton.

When I think of the *9th Symphony* the words powerful, menacing and mysterious come to mind. Throughout the performance I had the feeling that the power, the menace and the mysteriousness were not quite there. The first entry of the flugelhorn was not all it should have been to my ears, but then the player recovered and all was well. The orchestration uses a large array of percussion instruments including tubular bells and celesta but with the exception of the drums the phrase "hit it harder" kept coming into my mind. The acoustical doors certainly did their job and ensured the clarity of the scherzo but the overall effect was less than I had hoped for, the three climaxes near the end of the fourth movement much less. So whilst I was very pleased to hear a live performance of the *9th Symphony* this performance was somewhat disappointing in spite of the wonderful hall.

Ed Bullimore

The 6th in San Francisco

On 18 October I heard an excellent performance of Vaughan Williams's *6th Symphony* by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra – the first time in 10 years that this work had been played in the San Francisco area. The orchestra was led by guest conductor Peter Oundjian, Music Director of the Toronto Symphony. In addition to the *6th Symphony*, the program included pieces by Ravel and Gershwin. So you could say that Ravel – friend and teacher of Vaughan Williams, and certainly an admirer of Gershwin's music – was in some ways the unifying element of the program.

The concert began with an elegant, stylish rendition of Ravel's *Alborada del gracioso*. The orchestra played the piece with effortless precision and fine nuances of color. Next on the program was Gershwin's *Piano Concerto in F*, played with great verve and spirit by Jean-Yves Thibaudet. The performance had great vitality, and was appropriately jazzy and playful at times.

Before launching into the *6th Symphony* after intermission, Maestro Oundjian took the microphone and gave the audience his take on what the piece was about. His comments were mostly along the lines of how the music arose from Vaughan Williams' firsthand experience of war "in the trenches" and how parts of it depicted the Nazi menace, the buzz-bombing of London, the desolation of war's aftermath, and so on. If Vaughan Williams himself had been present, he probably would have stood up and bellowed in indignation at this point, since he greatly disliked the 6th being characterized as a "war symphony"! I didn't see any harm in the maestro's comments, though. For one thing, they had a basis in his own personal history: his father was an air-raid warden in England during the Blitz. And secondly, they probably created a good entry point for some listeners who were not familiar with this great work (and these listeners could learn from reading the program notes what Vaughan Williams thought of the "war symphony" viewpoint). More to the point, Maestro Oundjian emphasized that the *6th Symphony* is more representative of the composer's overall output than the pieces which the casual listener most associates with him – such as *The Lark Ascending* and *Fantasia* on *Greensleeves*. To make his point, he led the orchestra in a lovely rendition of the *Fantasia* and, after the briefest of pauses, launched directly into the opening of the symphony. Quite a contrast, indeed!

The performance of the *6th Symphony* itself was very, very fine and compared favorably with the recorded versions I have heard. Maestro Oundjian had a firm grasp of the overall structure of this great work and delivered a powerful, compelling interpretation. The pacing of the sinister second movement was superb; the music at times suggested a huge wave slowly building up and about to crash ashore and obliterate everything. The eerie fourth movement was gripping, with the orchestra maintaining the thread of intensity to the very end. I am very happy to have heard this wonderful concert, as live performances of Vaughan Williams' music are infrequent around here.

Kerry Lewis
Santa Clara, California, U.S.A.

Fantasia on Christmas Carols

On Friday December 9th 2005, the A Cappella choir of South Wilts Grammar School for Girls in Salisbury gave a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* to a packed – standing room only! – audience in St Martin's Church, the oldest in Salisbury.

The choir, sixty-seven strong, was established many years ago and competition to be a member remains strong in a school where there are also senior and junior choirs and three orchestras. The choir performs in regular concerts throughout the year and is invited to sing Evensong at Salisbury Cathedral on a regular basis.

The Fantasia is a new work in the choir's repertoire but one which, by the beautiful performance they gave, will be repeated. Many of the choir and audience had not heard the work previously but it was received with great enthusiasm.

Roland Freeman
Alderbury, Wiltshire, U.K.

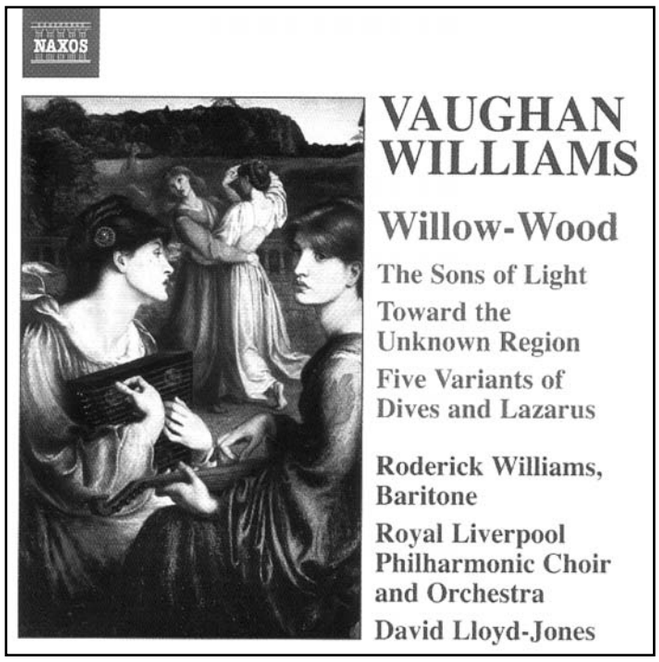
CD Reviews

Willow-Wood Premiere

Willow-Wood
Toward the Unknown Region
The Voice out of the Whirlwind
Five Variants for Dives and Lazarus
The Sons of Light

Roderick Williams, baritone
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra,
conducted by David Lloyd-Jones

NAXOS 8.557798



It was in November 2002 that the Trustees of the RVW Society agreed to pursue a recording project with the Elgar Society. The original plan was to include the world premiere recording of *Willow-Wood*, together with *England my England* and the song *The New Commonwealth*. The Elgar was to include *The Fringes of the Fleet* and the *Queen Alexandra Memorial Ode*. Somm were approached and agreed to undertake the project. Complications with editing of *Fringes of the Fleet* led to a focus on Vaughan Williams alone with the CD contents being expanded to include *Sons of Light* and *The Voice out of the Whirlwind*. Other complications led to the project transferring to Naxos. However, the main focus on *Willow-Wood* was retained, along with the first CD version of *Sons of Light* and the recording finally took place in February and May of 2005. Vital financial support was provided by RVW Ltd. and the RVW Society, the latter sadly not acknowledged by Naxos on the CD cover.

Willow-Wood certainly justifies our efforts over two and a half years. Although composed in 1902-03, with the women's chorus ad lib added in 1908-09, the work marks a considerable advance on the Tennyson and Christina Rossetti songs of 1902-03. The opening *adagio*, indicated as *misterioso*, sets the mood for the evocative baritone entry at "I sat with Love". The music deepens at "And my tears fell" and there is a nobility that points forward to *Toward the Unknown Region* of 1907. Another lovely moment of tenderness comes in the fourth sonnet at "I know I felt Love's face" before the work closes with the *closed lips vocalise* of the female choir gently supporting the soloist.

Roderick Williams is superb and clearly developed an excellent understanding of the piece through working closely with David Lloyd-Jones. The conductor spoke at the launch of the CD of the hours they spent together trying to fathom Rossetti's complex imagery. They clearly succeeded.

This CD at bargain price also includes a formidable performance of *Toward the Unknown Region*. The spine-tingling nobility of this work is felt to full effect as Vaughan Williams matches Whitman's ecstatic vision.

The Sons of Light is only slightly less impressive. Written in 1950, the work will remind listeners of the choral writing in Act III of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Other passages point back to *Scott of the Antarctic*, especially at 'on the ice where mountain ranges tower'. Ursula Vaughan Williams's poems are inspired and clearly captured the composer's imagination. The orchestration is rich, the choral writing effective.

With *The Voice of the Whirlwind* and the *Five Variants of Dives* and *Lazarus* added for good measure, this is a CD not to be resisted.

Stephen Connock

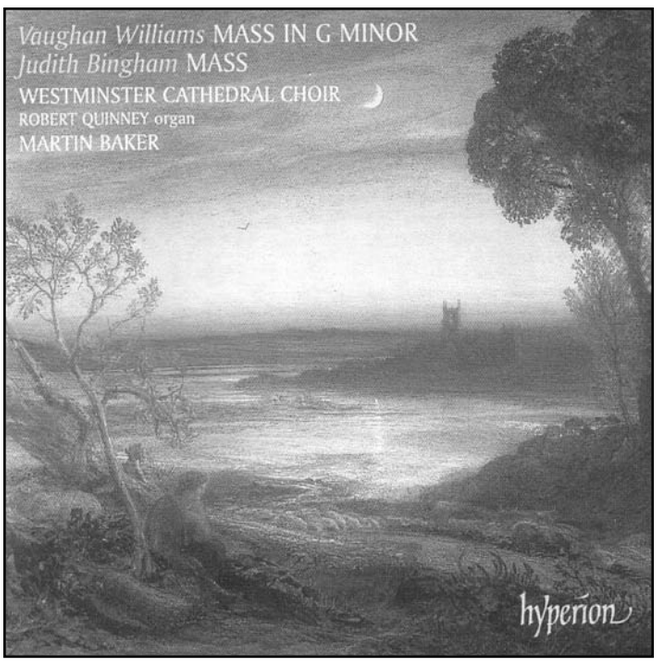
The MASS from WESTMINSTER

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Mass in G minor
Te Deum in G
O vos omnes
Valiant-for-Truth
A vision of aeroplanes

JUDITH BINGHAM
Mass

The Choir of Westminster Cathedral
directed by Martin Baker with Robert Quinney, organ

HYPERION CDA67503



Members will recall The Garland Appeal, launched in 1999 under the chairmanship of Stephen Connock, with the joint aims of supporting cancer research and English music. *Water lilies* was Judith Bingham's exquisite contribution to *A Garland for Linda*, the cycle of choral pieces which was the Appeal's most potent vehicle. Given the strong links between The Garland Appeal and the RVW Society, it is pleasing to see the same composer's *Mass*, composed in 2003 for the Choir of Westminster Cathedral, alongside several choral works by Vaughan Williams in this superb Hyperion collection.

The work is unusual in several respects. Two length y organ solos, superbly played here by Robert Quinney, begin and end the work. They have a narrative function, in that the work turns around Christ's encounter with the apostles on the road to Emmaus. There is no Credo, but in its place a setting of a short extract from St. Luke, in Latin, describing the moment of recognition of the risen Christ. I have not seen a score of the piece, but the musical language seems simpler than that of *Water lilies*, as befits a work composed for liturgical use. The music is full of variety and not one section of the work passes without some striking or compelling idea. Though not necessarily easy music, it undoubtedly fulfils Vaughan Williams' injunction that music should be beautiful, and I can only encourage members to give it a hearing.

The Vaughan Williams works are, as we would expect from this choir, beautifully sung. They are forthright and confident in the 1928 *Te Deum*, a work which would not, I'll bet, be easily recognised as Vaughan Williams in a "blind tasting", even by his devotees. The parallel chords at the opening of *O vos omnes*, on the other hand, could scarcely be by anybody else, and the same might be said of *Valiant-for-Truth*, a most beautiful short work I had the pleasure of conducting last year in a series of concerts with a French choir.

They loved it – why would they not? – and made a good job of it too, though not quite up to Westminster standards. A "blind tasting" might also be interesting in respect of *A Vision of Aeroplanes*, one of the strangest of all Vaughan Williams' works.

The sheer difficulty of this music must deter choirs to from putting it on, and even on disc it is a comparative rarity. After the ferocious organ introduction the opening chorus – "…behold, a whirlwind came out of the north" is quite terrifying, and nowhere more so in this extraordinarily virtuoso performance. One wonders what the boys must make of this piece, but their contribution is astounding, albeit with one or two moments of slightly strident tone in louder passages which I don't recall ever hearing from this choir before. There is a beautiful, short solo taken by an unnamed boy.

The main Vaughan Williams work on the disc is the *Mass in G minor*, and a fine performance it is. This work, which contains so many echoes of other Vaughan Williams works, seems to allow for many different interpretations, and the present one is perhaps very much in the liturgical mould. There is less emphasis on the extremes of the score, and, thinking of certain passages in the Gloria and Credo in particular, this is certainly not the most dramatic of readings. But it is beautifully sung with the solo contributions well taken, and Martin Baker's pacing of the work is exemplary.

The close of the work, the final seven bars, embody a *decrescendo* from *forte* to triple *piano*, and I feel sure that Vaughan Williams wanted the close to be softer than we hear, not only here, but in virtually every other recorded performance I've heard. Richard Hickox comes closest in his superb performance on Chandos, coupled with the *Fourth Symphony*, and that is perhaps the best all-round recommendation today, though of course you won't get the boys' voices and, to my mind more importantly, you won't get Judith Bingham's beautiful *Mass*.

William Hedley

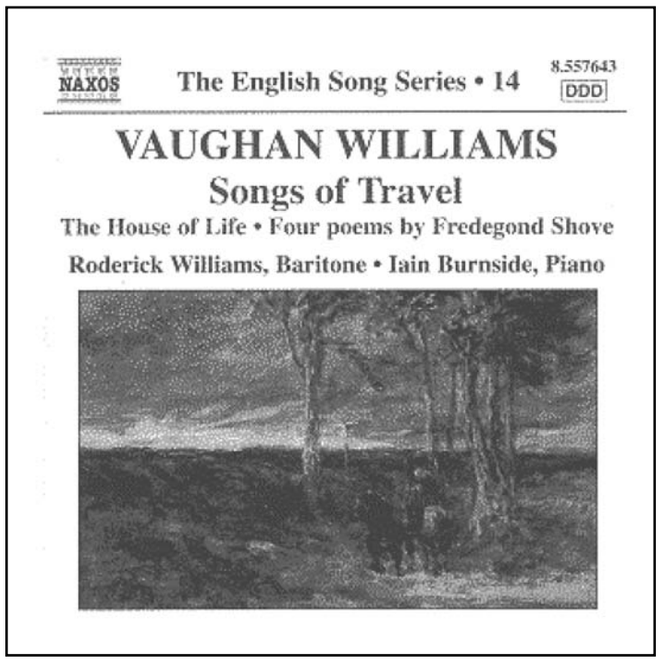
TWO "VAGABONDS"

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Songs of Travel
The House of Life
Linden Lea
Four Poems by Fredegond Shove

Roderick Williams, baritone
Ian Burnside, piano

NAXOS 8.557643



Roderick Williams is well known as a brilliant and passionate advocate of English music. His recordings on Naxos (not least his excellent Finzi disc in the English Song Series and Vaughan William's evocative *Willow-Wood*) have all been of the greatest calibre, with sensitive, expressive singing – and this disc is no exception.

Williams' voice is warm, and gloriously resonant and assured, with a gorgeous, rich, dark timbre. He sings with confidence and with fantastic enunciation – one really can hear every single word. Here – the fourteenth disc in the Naxos English Song Series, he performs Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel* and *House of Life cycles*, as well as *Linden Lea* and *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove*.

The Vagabond opens the disc – presenting the singer with a wonderful spring in his step and good plodding footsteps in accompaniment. In fact, throughout the disc Burnside proves a most sympathetic and adroit accompanist to Williams, providing supple, nimble, and beautifully flowing accompaniment in *Let beauty awake*, for instance. Williams' voice suits this repertoire down to the ground – absolutely perfect in *Wither must I wander* and suitably tender in *The infinite shining heavens*. He invests the opening of his exceptional rendition of Youth and love with a magical tranquillity and incredible clarity and searing beauty of voice that would make it worth purchasing the disc for this one song alone! *Bright is the ring of words* is spacious, bold and well paced, and in *I have trod the upward and the downward slope*, a barely-concealed sorrow and wisdom, and a heaviness of age and experience shine through Williams' convincing expression of the words.

The House of Life follows, with delightfully poignant and poetic

renditions of *Love–sight, Love's Last Gift* and *Silent Noon* (the latter song with perfect vibrato), and an exceptionally lyrical and beautiful *Love's Minstrels*.

Linden Lea is always a challenge to be undertaken, given the huge number of excellent – and classic – versions. Yet Williams certainly holds his own here. He takes the song at a good pace and is remarkably relaxed and unconcerned, with the result that the song flows naturally, without sounding at all rushed or forced. There are no histrionics, no misplaced passions, just a refreshing sense of space and ease – "Let other folk", for example, is merely confident, joyful and free, and not belted out as with some singers.

The lovely *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* are - *The Water Mill* apart - generally less well-known, but their neglect in favour of other works is unjustified. Williams captures the ghostly mood of *Motion and Stillness* perfectly, creating a mesmeric stillness at the end of the song. The lovely *Four Nights* is sensitively sung, and *The New Ghost* is performed with haunting intensity, Williams' resonant voice full of melancholic urgency.

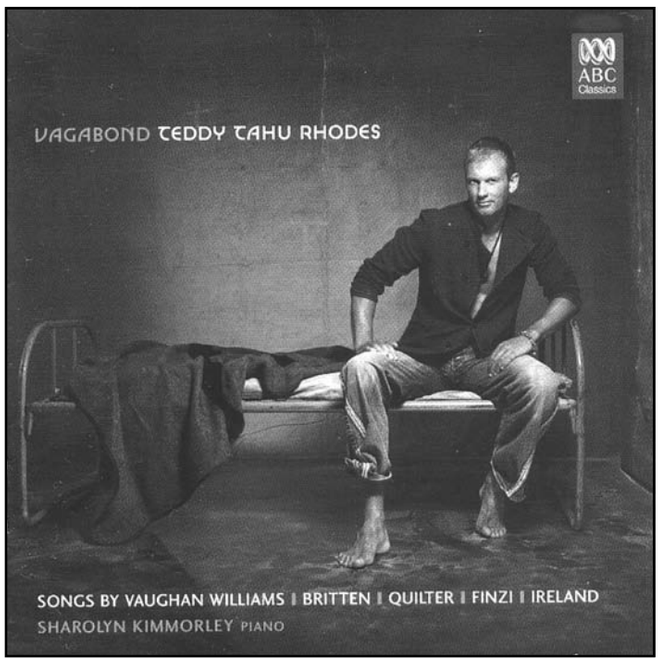
I was tremendously impressed by this disc, which exceeded the very high expectations I had entertained. The singing is outstanding – deeply intelligent, powerful and highly-charged. Some may find that Williams employs a little too much vibrato in the songs for their taste – this is not, however, a concern that troubles me in the slightest. The accompaniment is of the highest standard, and the songs are given astoundingly beautiful performances. I cannot recommend this disc highly enough.

Em Marshall

VAGABOND

JOHN IRELAND
Sea Fever; The Bells of San Marie; The Vagabond
ROGER QUILTER
Three Shakespeare Songs, Op. 6
GERALD FINZI
Let Us Garlands Bring, Op. 18
BENJAMIN BRITTEN (arr.)
The Salley Gardens; The Foggy, Foggy Dew; O Waly, Waly
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Songs of Travel

Teddy Tahu Rhodes, baritone
Sharolyn Kimmorley, piano
ABC CLASSICS 476 7175



Teddy Tahu Rhodes is a New Zealander whose career, reading his biographical notes, has been concentrated in his home country, in Australia and in the United States, though appearances in Europe, including the United Kingdom, are planned for the future. He possesses a most beautiful voice which he uses to good effect, strong and virile where required and full in tone and colour when singing quietly. Intonation is impeccable and attention to line quite admirable. Just occasionally I sensed a certain dryness in the middle of the voice, though most listeners will probably not be bothered by this.

The recital opens with three well-known settings of Masefield by John Ireland. They are most beautifully sung, though Rhodes has a curious way with "jingle" and "mingle" in the first verse of *The Bells of San Marie*, making them sound more like "jingel" and "mingel"; "gentle", however, in the same verse, is delivered quite normally. *The Vagabond* is particularly well done, very introspective and bringing out well the tender sadness Ireland found in the poem.

A shameful admission, but I think this was the first time I had heard Quilter's Shakespeare settings. They are beautiful, the two more pensive numbers at any rate, and Rhodes makes the most of them. But they struck me as rather generalised responses to the poems, especially when set beside Finzi's exquisite *Let Us Garlands Bring*. In this work Rhodes strikes an admirable balance between an interventionist approach – illustrating particular words, for example – and allowing the poetry and music to speak for themselves, so well exemplified by Roderick Williams in his recent, excellent Naxos disc. *Who is Sylvia?* is straightforward and small-scale, but Rhodes fears comparison with few rivals in his moving reading of *Fear no more the heat of the sun*. The two final songs are delivered with irresistible panache, but the first song, *Come away, come away, death*, presents a curiosity. In the phrase "My part of death, no one so true/Did share it" Rhodes sings what appears to be a wrong note. It seems such an obvious misreading – and therefore easily corrected – that I concluded at first that there must be some doubt about it, an unclear manuscript for example. Yet it is certainly at odds with the score, there is no harmonic reason for it, and I have never heard the phrase sung like that before. A pity, too, that he chooses to move the music forward during the last, long vocalise on the word "weep".

Let Us Garlands Bring was dedicated to Vaughan Williams on his birthday in 1942, and it is logical to find *Songs of Travel* included in the programme. An upbeat tempo for the first song takes away some of the feeling of the vagabond tramping the open road, the more so since Rhodes presses on even more in the third, varied verse. *Let Beauty Awake* is most touchingly sung, especially the second verse and the final verse of *The Roadside Fire* rises to a strong and affecting climax. He takes the first verse of *Youth and Love* quite slowly, very inward, and brings great passion to the second. He is then very convincing and communicative in the two inward songs which follow, the strange *In Dreams* and *The Infinite Shining Heavens*. He sings *Whither Must I Wander* with an affecting simplicity, and finds the requisite imposing nature for the opening of the following *Bright is the Ring of Words*. So touching, too, is the final song, *I have trod the upward and the downward slope,* held back by the composer, even in publication, and found amongst his papers only after his death. The song itself is a kind of recitative, but the references to earlier songs in the cycle are most touching. That Vaughan Williams kept this song hidden is only one of many enigmas in the life of this most enigmatic of composers. Teddy Tahu Rhodes sings it beautifully.

It is in the Britten arrangements that the tendency to dryness mentioned above seems most in evidence, and this, plus a certain *staccato* delivery, takes away, for this listener at least, a fair part of the charm of these arrangements.

Teddy Tahu Rhodes is accompanied by Sharolyn Kimmorley, and her playing is full of character and insight. One senses a strong musical personality and the recital is a true collaboration. The disc is well recorded and the presentation is excellent if you like that sort of thing, the singer featuring as a rather hunky Vagabond bare-footed on an iron bedstead. The accompanying essay, by Camilla Gregg, is excellent, filled with interesting observations with most of which one can only concur.

The disc, then, can be confidently recommended to anyone to whom the programme appeals, and I heartily do just that. Unfortunately, however, we can't stop there. Not quite ten years ago there appeared on Deutsche Grammophon a recital by Bryn Terfel entitled *The Vagabond*. The same songs by Ireland, Finzi and Vaughan Williams appear, and he sings them with a quite extraordinary intensity. Arguably too much intensity at times: his reading of Finzi's *Who is Sylvia?* borders on the histrionic, as if he wants to make a bigger song out of it than it really is. But who else has ever made the exclamation marks audible like this in the lines beginning "No exorciser harm thee!" or more beautifully demonstrated the word *amabile* in the tempo indication to *O Mistress Mine?* And his delivery of the line "Youth's a stuff will not endure" will break the heart of any listener, particularly anyone over, say, fifty (and male.) He has an extraordinary ability to sing *pianissimo*, and some might think he uses it too often, sometimes when the music doesn't really demand it. Others – myself included – find it irresistible and I although I haven't yet heard Roderick Williams' performance reviewed above I find Terfel's reading of *Songs of Travel* the most satisfying of them all. Instead of Quilter and Britten there are Butterworth's settings of Housman, including a performance of *With rue my heart is laden* – a song where interpretation is all: the page is almost devoid of notes – which is the most affecting performance of any song I have ever heard on disc.

William Hedley

VINTAGE PERFORMANCES FROM ABRAVANEL

Symphony No.6
Dona Nobis Pacem
Five Variants on "Dives and Lazarus"
Flos Campi

Blanche Christensen, soprano
William Metcalf, baritone
Sally Peck Lentz, viola
Utah Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Maurice Abravanel

SILVERLINE CLASSICS (CD/DVD) 284206-2 .

In the Letters Section of issue No. 31 of the RVW Society Journal, Thomas Muething pointed out that Silverline had issued these recordings as a DVD-Audio. Now, to their credit, Silverline have issued them in an alternative 2 disc DVD/CD set. This involves two double-sided discs each side of which can be played on either a DVD or CD player.

On the positive side these are excellent transfers of long unavailable classic recordings of Vaughan Williams's greatest symphony and one of his finest and most moving choral works. The sound is undoubtedly superior to that found on the earlier Vanguard CD (SVC-7) and great care has evidently been taken (as explained at length on the DVD) in the re-mastering from the original analogue tapes.

I enthused at length about Abravanel's performance of the Sixth Symphony in Issue No. 27 and would only add here that I believe that this is one of the very greatest recordings of this epic score, worthy to stand alongside the two earlier recordings (Dutton/Pearl/Decca) by Sir Adrian Boult as well as those from Stokowski, Paavo Berglund, Andrew Davis, Bryden Thomson and Bernard Haitink.

I should add that my enthusiasm was not entirely shared by Andrew Achenbach, in his interesting comparative survey in Gramophone Magazine and it is true that, in Abravanel's hands, the (otherwise finely sustained) Epilogue is not as "inconsolable" as in the unique 1953 Boult LPO recording on Decca. Nevertheless, like Neville Marriner's underrated recording on Collins Classics, it manages to convey both despair and compassion emphasizing, perhaps, the ambivalence at the heart of human existence.

It is unfortunate, however, that the evident care taken in restoring the original recordings was not evident in the presentation of the two-disc set. The DVD material is especially disappointing, focusing almost entirely on the career of the conductor Maurice Abravanel. The visual material consists largely of newspaper cuttings, programme bills and photos of Abravanel's career. Some of these reviews do relate to performances of Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony at the Fairfield Hall in London which were, evidently, contemporaneous with the recording (1966) but the absence of a pause facility made this a frustrating reading experience because as soon as I started to read one of the reviews, the screen shifted to something else! The "Bonus Material" on the DVD related either to Maurice Abravanel or focused on the technical side of the Silverline transfer. Nothing wrong with this of course, but it would have been nice to discover something about either the music or the composer! There is absolutely no information about the music on either the (largely non-existent) sleeve notes or on the DVD. Furthermore the brief biographical notes on the DVD are perfunctory and inaccurate: Vaughan Williams, for example, is described as having studied at the University of "Cambria" and even the year of his death is incorrectly given as 1959.

The photograph on the front of the disc (which seems to be common to all the Silverline releases) consists of drab monochrome image of an anonymous (headless) conductor. To add insult to injury, the first time I opened up the disc, all the teeth holding the CD/DVD in place immediately disintegrated! Abravanel's pioneering recording of *Dona Nobis Pacem* is first-rate although (unsurprisingly) no texts are included. In this sense, the presentation and design concept were far superior in the earlier Vanguard CD release of the two main works here, which featured perceptive notes from Sidney Finkelstein and all the relevant texts. There is something oddly appropriate about hearing an American choir (University of Utah Civic Chorale) declaiming the poetry of Walt Whitman, which adds to the attractions of Abravanel's powerful and sensitive performance. The baritone and soprano soloists are excellent as is Sally Peck Lentz, the viola soloist in *Flos Campi*. The performance of the *Five Variants on "Dives and Lazarus"* is worthy to stand alongside other fine recordings from John Barbirolli and Reginald Jacques (both on EMI). However, there is only a few seconds break between the major works and the shorter pieces, which is also rather unhelpful.

In conclusion, this set is worth purchasing for Abravanel's marvellous performances of four classic Vaughan Williams scores in excellent new transfers. The design concept and DVD material, however, is very disappointing (not one photograph of the composer anywhere in the set). Silverline would have been wiser, in my view, to have dispensed with the DVD material altogether and issue this on a single CD.

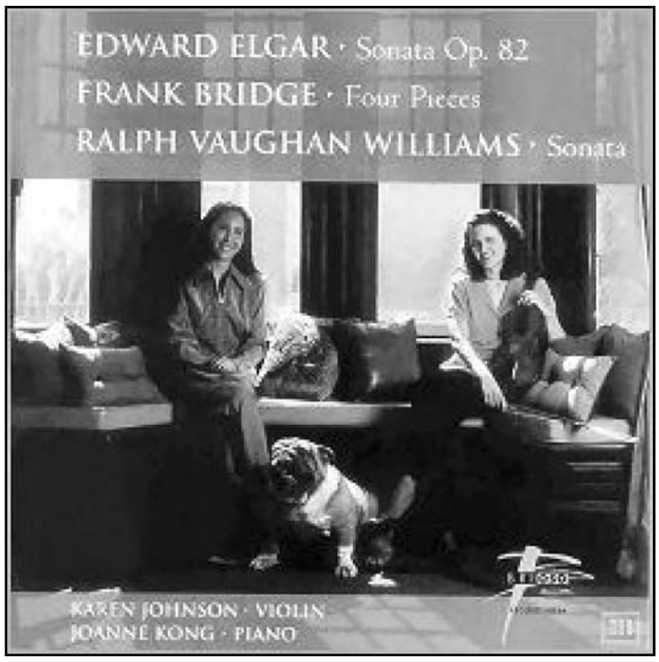
Jeffrey Davis

VIOLIN & PIANO

EDWARD ELGAR
Violin Sonata, Op. 82
FRANK BRIDGE
Four Pieces
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Violin Sonata

Karen Johnson, violin
Joanne Kong, piano

BRIOSO BR 147 (available from www.brioso.com)



Brioso may not be a familiar label to most readers, but this Californian-based company has assembled here a most attractive programme of English chamber music, with the Elgar and VW Violin Sonatas enclosing four short salon pieces by Frank Bridge.

Karen Johnson is the sweet-toned violin soloist. Right from the outset these are fresh and clean-cut performances that emphasise the lyrical side of the music.This approach is much to the advantage of the Vaughan Williams Sonata of 1954, which can sometimes sound awkward, even uncomfortably jagged, particularly in the central *Scherzo*.

Here, the opening *Fantasia* sounds spontaneous, the *Scherzo* forthright, a cousin perhaps of Satan's music in *Job*, and the final *Theme and Variations* persuasive, despite their sometimes rhapsodic nature. This movement incorporates a reworked version of a theme from the last movement of the early (now published, contrary to what is said in the sleeve notes) Piano Quintet in C minor of 1903.

The last section, particularly its haunting coda, attains a serenity reminiscent of *The Lark Ascending*, pointing up an affinity that can be lost in less sympathetic readings of this piece.

All in all, this CD is well worth searching out, particularly if you have previously been resistant to this challenging RVW work.

Martin Murray

CLARINET & PIANO

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
Six Studies in English Folk Song
JOHN CARMICHAEL
Fêtes Champêtres
LEIGHTON LUCAS
Clarinet Concerto
HUMPHREY PROCTER-GREGG
Clarinet Concerto

Ian Scott, clarinet
Royal Ballet Sinfonia
Conducted by Barry Wordsworth

DUTTON CDLX 7153

It was the *Six Studies in English Folk Song* that first introduced me to the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams forty years ago. Forty summers with the length of forty long winters! And again, the beauty and simplicity of the music is wonderful to behold. Back in 1965 it was Jean Stewart in the viola arrangement, with piano, on a still-loved World Record Club LP not yet, to my knowledge, transferred to CD. Now it is Arnold Foster's orchestral arrangement of 1957 but with a clarinet as the solo instrument. This is a world premiere recording of the orchestral version. There is a version for oboe d'amore and strings by Robin Canter on Pickwick MCD 59 which is quite lovely, but the Foster orchestration is even more beautiful. Just listen to the gorgeous arrangement of the second song, *Spurn Point*, and the fourth song *She borrowed some of her Mother's Gold* – if you are not moved then I will personally refund you the cost of this CD!

Of the rest of the rarities on this CD, the Procter-Gregg Clarinet Concerto, with a beguiling slow movement, repays further attention. However, it is for the RVW that this CD should be purchased.

Stephen Connock

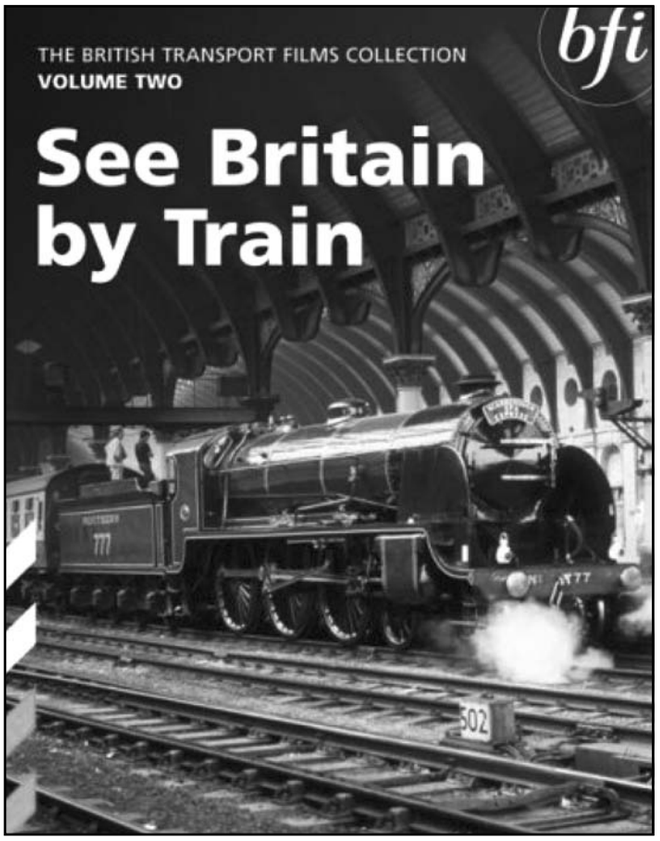
Crossword Solutions:

Across: 1. National, 5. Lea, 7. Sibling, 9. Saki. 10. Dona, 12. Ballade, 14. On Board, 15. Take, 18. Gold, 20. Nothing, 22. Two, 23. Mistrust.
Down: 1. No Sad Thought, 2. Tubin, 3. Odin, 4. La, 5.Lea, 6. A Ninety-Eight, 8. Glad, 9. Solent, 11. Anjold, 12. Bran, 16. Adieu, 17. Stet, 19. LSO (or LPO!), 20. PM.

DVD

***The England of Elizabeth*, in**
See Britain by Train, Vol. 2
John Taylor, director

2 DVDs
BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE (tel. [44] (0)20 7957 4767 or www.bfi.org.uk/video)



Like many great English composers, Vaughan Williams was tempted into doing splendid work for the cinema by the indefatigable Muir Mathieson, who reassured the composer that the tedious business of actually fitting the music to the frames of film would be handled by him and his associates. *Scott of the Antarctic*, is, of course, the best known of his glorious scores, but some of his finest work was done in the inventive, exquisite score he wrote for the documentary *The England of Elizabeth* in 1957. The piece has been recorded by André Previn, and (more recently) in a more extended form by Rumon Gamba, but the opportunities to hear the music in situ (as it were) have been rare, despite the occasional TV showing. So Volume Two of the BFI's *See Britain by Train* series is to be welcomed, for yoking in (however tenuously) an excellent transfer of John Taylor's half-hour film. In this restoration, it looks glorious, with glowing, lambent colours, and crisp, well-defined mono sound that does justice to RVW's lively trumpet fanfares. The rest of the score fares less well, but that's down to Taylor's use of the music, ruthless suppressing it by abrupt volume dips whenever Alec Clunes' pedestrian narration kicks in – but this is, of course, due to the exigencies of documentary style of the day, where music was very much a secondary adjunct. Looked at today, when Vaughan Williams' score has become the most important aspect of this workaday film, it's impossible not to lament the fact that the filmmakers didn't realise that the one element of the piece that would survive could have been showcased with more sensitivity. Ironically, another film in the collection, the groundbreaking *Holiday*, also 1957 (with its panorama of British seaside days out), does just that, foregrounding Chris Barber's lively jazz score & escheming commentary. But, caveats aside, Vaughan Williams aficionados – with realistic expectations – need not hesitate.

Barry Forshaw

ANOTHER VIEW…
These twelve films include *West Country Journey* (1957), *The Heart of England* (1954) and Coast of Clyde (1958) alongside *England of Elizabeth* (1957). RVW's score for the British Transport film, directed by John Taylor, is by far the most impressive musically. Contributions from Elisabeth Lutyens (*The Heart of England* and *Any Man's Kingdom*) Doreen Carwithers (*East Anglian Holiday*) and especially Grace Williams (*A Letter from Wales*) are worth hearing as all three composers reflect in a rich pastoral vein the evocative images.

Those of you with a nostalgic frame of mind and a liking for steam trains (in other words, all of you) will find much to cherish in the 2 DVD set. Here we have a Britain that is always sunny, where cyclists give hand signals when turning left or right (and not of the obscene kind common nowadays), when men wore a tie on the roller-coaster ride, when roads were free of traffic, when men all had a short back and sides, when women all looked like a young Elizabeth Taylor and when children had hobbies like collecting postcards. O happy days!

With Technicolor, landscapes are always glorious. The idea of British Transport films was to inspire people to travel and after seeing *Coast of Clyde* I can't wait to visit Largs and Wemyss Bay. Perhaps the station will not today be covered in roses as it was in 1958, perhaps there is no station today, but the optimist in me will go nonetheless. In these films, the importance of the seasons is felt, along with the innocence of childhood. And always there is Shakespeare, inspiring the best music from Vaughan Williams to accompany the images of the Bard's birthplace in Stratford in *England of Elizabeth*.

The nostalgia sometimes needs tempering with more humour or irony in the way that made John Betjeman's films so unforgettable. There is little irony in these films. In *A Letter from Wales*, Donald Houston visits Paddington station at night, sees the mail train for Wales, and this produces reflections and memories of his early life. Thus "I found love for the first time – I wonder where she is now?" The atmosphere is of the *Brief Encounter* type: I fully expected to see Trevor Howard emerge from the steam with an eccles cake in his hand.

For a wonderful 3 hours of visual nostalgia, I recommend this set, especially with RVW at his most lyrical in *England of Elizabeth*.

Stephen Connock

The Leith Hill Place Festival 2006

An amazing chance to celebrate the works of both Charles Darwin and Ralph Vaughan Williams in the gardens of the house that was home to both, Leith Hill Place.

Friday 14th July 2006: the first Leith Hill Place Darwin lecture. An eminent speaker (to be confirmed) will deliver the first LHP Darwin lecture on stage in the gardens at Leith Hill Place.

Saturday 15th July 2006: Vaughan Williams' music performed by a specially commissioned orchestra, again on stage in the gardens of Leith Hill Place. Making up the programme will be a selection of the folk songs which so inspired Vaughan Williams.

Sunday 16th July 2006: A celebration of new musical initiatives of all styles.

All this in the fantastic setting of Leith Hill Place.

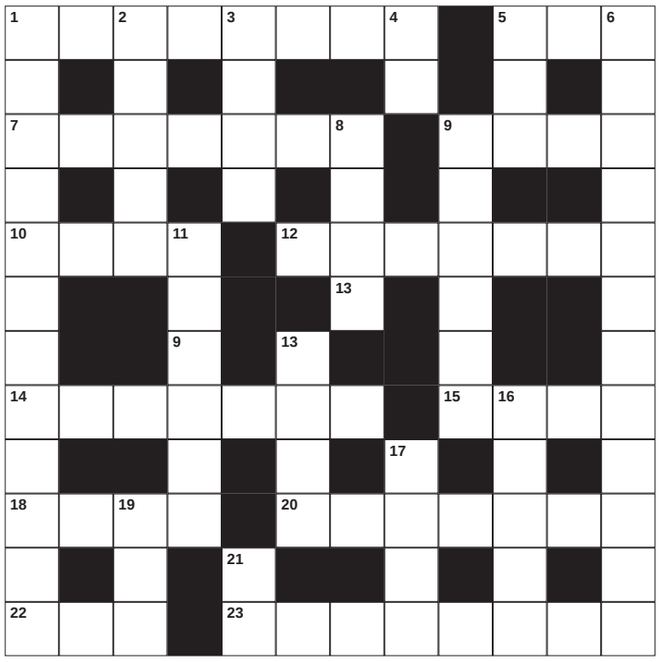
Fuller details in the June Journal.

Booking information will be available soon via The National Trust and the RVW Society, or send contact details to:

Lhpfestival@Hotmail.co.uk

for advance notification of ticket availability.

RVW Crossword No. 21 *by Michael Gainsford*



Across

1. Type of music subject of series of lectures by RVW in 1934 (8)
5. Linden (3)
7. Randolph was RVW's (7)
9. Pen name of short story author born two years before RVW (4)
10. The 'give' in *Dona Nobis Pacem* (4)
12. Went with the Scherzo for string quintet of 1904 (7)
14. *(with 6 down)* Nautical folk song from East Anglia incorporated in the *Norfolk Rhapsody* No 1(2,5, 1,6-5)
15. What to do with the lips of 1925 (4)
18. She borrowed some of this in the *Six Studies in English Folk Song* (4)
20. This is what is here for tears in 1936 (7)
22. Number of the *London* Symphony (3)
23. Pilgrim's baritone neighbour (8)

Down

1. Chorale, item XV of *Hodie* (2, 3, 7)
2. Estonian/Swedish composer (1905-1982) (5)
3. Supreme Norse deity (4)
4. 6th note of sol-fa scale (2)
5. As 5 across (3)
6. See 14 across
8. What I was in Parry's anthem (4)
9. The unpublished *Impression* of 1903 (6)
11. First name of the dedicatee of the Fourth Symphony (6)
13. Start the Bach concerti with a healthy breakfast? (4)
16. French sounding German folk song arranged by RVW in in 1903 (5)
17. Let it stand (4)
19. A capital orchestra (1, 1, 1)
21. Churchill, Attlee, Wilson, Thatcher, Blair etc (1,1)

ANSWERS PAGE 26

Next Edition: June 2006

The Pastoral Symphony

Deadline for contributions

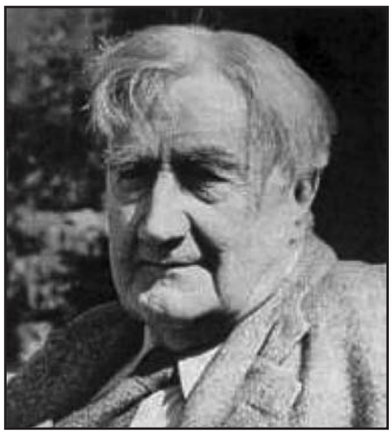
10 April 2006

Call for Papers

The October 2006 edition will concentrate on the shorter choral works

Deadline for contributions

August 10 2006



Submissions to the Journal are welcome in any form and all receive equal attention. Email attachments or articles submitted on disk make the production of the Journal much easier as no retyping is necessary, also reducing the risk of errors.