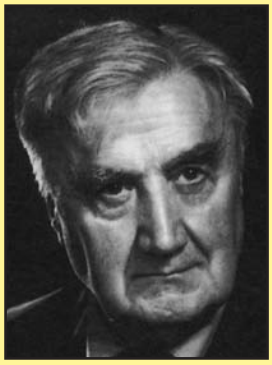

Journal of the
RVW
Society

No.37 Oct 2006

In this issue...

WILL WE EVER KNOW?

Eric Seddon's impressive article on Vaughan Williams and religion in the June Journal has stimulated considerable debate amongst members. His argument was that Vaughan Williams continuously investigated and deepened his meditation on Christianity. He concluded that "Vaughan Williams was a Christian composer, at least in that his works are Christian. In other words, his pieces bear witness to the theology, the doctrines and the mysticism of Christianity."

Those members who were present at those wonderful performances of *St Matthew Passion* in Dorking in the 1950s all testify to the religious fervour and devotion inspired by VW's conducting. Others recall Vaughan Williams attending evensong in local churches in Dorking – quietly, drawing no attention to himself, but always in contemplative mood. Certainly his knowledge of Christian symbolism was deep and his study of history at Cambridge would have given him a wide historical perspective on Christianity. Perhaps the famous quotation from Bertrand Russell simply reflects either Russell's personal viewpoint or the prevailing wisdom in a Cambridge social milieu dominated by Whitman's philosophy.

Tatyana Egorova, from Russia, wonders why *Job* was not mentioned in Eric Seddon's article as she says this is "an ideal subject for consideration of evolutionary processes in religious consciousness of the composer". She also says that it is impossible to deny Vaughan Williams' pantheistical leanings. Both *Riders to the Sea* and *A Sea Symphony* can be viewed as the credo of orthodox pantheists – "God is the Nature and the Nature there is God."

Thy road is ready: and Thy paths made straight

Will we ever know Vaughan Williams's thinking on religion? It is very complex. What we do know is that his music contains a mystical element that uplifts us. In his mysticism there lies a nobility of spirit that, as Simona Pakenham has written, is "at once passionate and restrained, urgent and tender."

All this will be debated at length in the forthcoming Symposium *The Best of Me ....* organised with the Elgar Society. Eric Seddon has also accepted our invitation to speak at the Seminar on *Pilgrim's Progress*. Very few places are left – so do not hesitate! The weekend Symposium takes place from 24-26 November 2006 at Midhurst in West Sussex, not far from Elgar's home. Speakers include Michael Kennedy, Diana McVeagh and James Day. Tickets are available by contacting Terry Barfoot on tel: 02392 383356.

Happy Birthday Simona

Mention of Simona Pakenham reminds us that she was 90 on 25th September. Our warm best wishes to her on her birthday.

Stephen Connock

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From the Editor

Pilgrim's Progress
FROM
THIS WORLD
TO
That which is to come:
Delivered under the Similitude of a
DREAM.
Wherein is Discovered,
The Manner of his setting out,
His Dangerous JOURNEY,
AND
Safe Arrival at the Desired Country.
By JOHN BUNYAN,
The Ninth Edition with Additions.
I have used Similitudes, Hosea 12. 10.
Licensed and Entered according to Order.
LONDON,
Printed for Nathaniel Ponder at the Peacock in the Poultry, near the Church, 1683.

Looking through back numbers of the Journal it seems that the February 1998 edition was the first to focus on a single subject or theme, in that particular case, Gustav Holst. Finding a theme is one of the challenges of editing the Journal, but at least the Editor can indulge his particular interests. For the June 2005 issue I decided to square up to the subject of religion. I was happy that Byron Adams agreed to write something, and three members sent in contributions, but I had expected more from members on what is, after all, one of the most important Vaughan William's topics. For the present issue the theme was the shorter choral works, and again I expected a lively response as I was sure that many members were amateur choral singers or conductors with first-hand experience of these pieces. A submission duly appeared from John Barr, and I am grateful to him as otherwise the only contributor on the subject would have been myself. But back to religion, and to that strange period following publication of the Journal when several members wrote to me on the subject but – rather sinister, this – did not want their views published. So I was particularly pleased when, after several exchanges, Eric Seddon agreed to go into print. His article in the last issue provoked a response which, in RVW Society Journal terms at least, amounts to an avalanche. Inevitably there is some common ground in these contributions, but after due consideration I decided to publish them all. Scholarly articles appear in the Journal alongside non-specialist pieces, and it is hoped that all members find a fair amount to interest them. But in any case the Journal is certainly a forum, a platform from which members may speak to each other. This may take the form of a closely reasoned article or a simple letter to the Editor, though be assured that publication in the Journal does not necessarily mean that I agree with all the views expressed. Whether we agree with him or not, Eric's piece amounts to a report of serious research and reflection, but this in not the only kind of article members want to read. I had fond hopes that many this time would want to share their choral singing experiences, but no, the quills were sharpened to respond to Eric instead. Perhaps I'll ask him to suggest the themes for forthcoming issues.

Let us move on. In my own piece about the choral works I write about *Valiant-for-truth*, a small masterpiece to words by John Bunyan. Somewhere in the Society there is a person as enthusiastic about Bunyan as Vaughan Williams was. That person has many ideas to share with us, as others also do. I should very much like these people to contribute to the next issue.

I have been in correspondence recently with Adam Stern, the Music Director of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Elsewhere in this issue you will read what a great service he is about to do for Vaughan Williams enthusiasts by putting on a rare performance of the Ninth Symphony. Not the least of the many remarkable aspects of this work is the evidence that Vaughan Williams was still searching for new ways of saying things. Who knows what he might have discovered had he been spared even longer? Perhaps Adam will find the time to tell us what conducting this mighty work is like. I do hope so. Perhaps someone will have the courage to listen to each of the ten or so recordings and let us know which seems to be the finest, and why. We shall see.

William Hedley

O HOW AMIABLE and the *ABINGER PAGEANT*

by John Barr

O how amiable is an anthem that I have played and directed at various times for a period of forty-three years at the different churches where I was organist. At one of them, St. Piran's in Jos, Nigeria, I played the anthem a semitone lower (on a portable harmonium) enabling the sopranos to reach their highest note a little more easily. I also used it several times in Madison, Wisconsin at the University Presbyterian Church, playing a five rank organ. During one of these times I dreamt that Vaughan Williams himself came to my choir practice and in a good-humored way rehearsed the anthem leading from a non-existent piano in our chancel. When I woke up the dream became a pleasant memory. Even though I have been familiar with this anthem for some time, its significance has only gradually increased for me, even as I write this article.

O how amiable was published in 1940 and appeared later in *The Oxford Easy Anthem Book* as the final selection in this collection of fifty pieces. The demands on the singers are mostly modest. Although for SATB, the texture is largely two-voice, each pair in unison, or four-voice with ST and AB doubling each other at the octave. Actual four-voice harmony appears only near the end of the anthem on "our handiwork" where the sopranos sing their highest note, A flat.

The foregoing is intended for those few who are unfamiliar with this composition. The context for the anthem, however, may be less well known to many. The title page indicates "Anthem for the Dedication of a Church or other Festivals (Originally written for the Abinger Pageant, 1934)." It is dedicated to "F.F.", Dame Frances Farrer, who was an effective organizer in the Leith Hill Musical Festival and wife of Lord Farrer, a prominent land owner in the Abinger Parish. (UVW 74 and 167)

Before describing the anthem, I would like to discuss the Pageant itself and Vaughan Williams' musical contribution to it. All of the musical items are given in Kennedy's *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* and the content of the pageant can be summarized from E. M. Forster's book, *Abinger Harvest.*

The Abinger Pageant was presented on 14 and 18 July, 1934 for the benefit of the Abinger Church Preservation Fund and was written by E. M. Forster to a scenario by Anne Farrer and Tom Harrison, who also produced it. (Forster 349 and UVW 202) As well as the original anthem, Vaughan Williams also arranged folk songs, folk dances, metrical Psalm tunes and plainsongs which were played by the Band of the 2nd Bn. West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own). (Kennedy, *The Works*... 241) Kennedy lists the specific music as follows: "Triumphant Music: Latin hymn, *Angelus Ad Virginem*; Latin chant, *Coelestis Urbs Hierusalem*; Sussex folk song, *Twankydillo*; Country Dances, *The Triumph*, and *Haste to the wedding*; Folk song, *Seventeen come Sunday*; Folk song, *The sweet Nightingale*; Psalm 84, *How Amiable Are Thy Dwellings*; Hymn, *O God our help in a ges past*. The manuscript of this music kept in the British Library consists of "Full score and piano arrangement, partly Autograph (57289). Includes copy of programme notes and narrator's speeches by E. M. Forster." (Kennedy, *A Catalogue*...145)

Forster's complete script of the Pageant (Part 5 of *Abinger Harvest*) consists of a prologue followed by a chronological sequence of six episodes tracing the history of Abinger parish up to the then present time of 1934. This script is preceded by a "Foreword to Visitors" defining Abinger as "a country parish…over ten miles long…But very narrow, and it stretches like a thin green ribbon from the ridge of the North Downs right away to the Sussex border in the South." (Forster 349) In the main body of the script the places are clearly indicated where Vaughan Williams needed to provide the music.

In the Prologue a Woodman appears to welcome the audience to Abinger's village and woods. He serves as the narrator throughout the Pageant, filling in the events of history and the dramatic episodes as they occur. Episode 1 moves from the beginning of history to the Norman Conquest. No music by Vaughan Williams is indicated in this section.

In Episode 2: The Middle Ages, Scene 2, there are two passages of music provided by Vaughan Williams. The place is the Manor of Abinger courtyard in the year 1220 where villagers await their archbishop, Stephen Langton, who is to dedicate the new chancel of Abinger Church. Pilgrims from Canterbury approach singing the Latin Hymn to the Virgin *Angelus ad Virginem*. "The first verse speaks of the Annunciation, [and] the second implores the Virgin to intercede with Christ so that our sins may be forgiven us and we may enjoy eternal life, after the exile of this world." (Forster 354) The melody for this hymn appears in *The Oxford Book of Carols* (1964) as no. 52. It is a lilting tune in G major with a flat seventh appearing twice near its end. Ursula Vaughan Williams mentioned this as a tune Vaughan Williams loved and used later in his nativity play, *The First Nowell* (1958). (UVW 202) When the archbishop arrives and is received, monks lead a procession to the church singing a Latin chant in plainsong suited to the dedication of a building, *Coelestis Urbs Hierusalem*. "The first verse celebrates the Heavenly Jerusalem, [and] the second, gives glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost…The entire company enter the church and the episode closes." (Forster 355)

Episode 3: The Hammer Forge takes place at Hammer Green where the forge and whipping post are located. The time is 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada when George Nevill, Earl of Abergavenny was Lord of the Manor of Paddington. The anvils can be heard and the Surrey-Sussex Smiths' folk song *Twankydillow* is sung "off":

Here's a health to the jolly blacksmith, the best of all the fellows,
Who works at his anvil while the boy blows the bellows;
Which makes my bright hammer to rise and to fall,
Here's to old Cole and to young Cole, and to old Cole of all,
Twankydillo, Twankydillo
A roaring pair of bagpipes and of the green willow.

General activity is the background for a man who is dragged by a steward to the whipping post. However, a hunting-horn sounds and the Lord of the Manor arrives and releases the man. Soon after comes news of the Spanish Armada's defeat followed by the merriment of the country dance, *Gathering Peascods*. The scene closes with the sounds of *Twankydillo*.

Episode 4: The Days of John Evelyn concerns the time in which Abinger woods had been destroyed due to the iron works. John Evelyn, author of *Sylva*, a book about trees, urged people to replant them. The time is 1643 to 1660 when Puritans seized control of the Established Church, and they and the villagers, now in black, sing the old metrical version of the 68th Psalm:

Let God arise and then his foes
Will turn themselves to flight,
His en'mies then will run abroad
And scatter out of sight.
And as the fire doth melt the wax
And wind blow smoke away
So in the presence of the Lord
The wicked shall decay.

This metrical psalm text is in double common meter (DCM) which consists of eight lines per stanza, each line having alternately eight and six syllables. The question arises as to which metrical Psalm tune Vaughan Williams chose to sing with these words? *Let God Arise* is in neither *The English Hymnal* nor *Songs of Praise*, both of which Vaughan Williams edited. In the former the Genevan melody for Psalm 68 appears

as no. 544, but its meter (887887D) does not fit the metrical psalm quoted above. In Erik Routley's monumental historical study, *The Music of Christian Hymns,* he happens to include the complete melody of OLD 68 which is a DCM tune and fits the text in question perfectly. This melody comes from the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* of 1558 so it would be chronologically correct to the event in the Pageant. (Routley 37 and Ex. 89) This might entice one to check the manuscript cited above to see what tune Vaughan Williams actually did choose, if not the present possibility.

During this singing John Evelyn slowly rides a horse across the stage. After the Psalm, different music symbolizes the Restoration of Charles II when the villagers quickly remove their black cloaks revealing their colorful clothes and sing a song of the period, *Here's a health unto His Majesty*, not mentioned among the music Vaughan Williams arranged. This is followed by a country dance, *The Triumph* at which time the Puritans leave. After this a wedding conducted by the Rector of Abinger takes place in which his daughter marries a man from London. Among those in attendance is John Evelyn and his wife. Another country dance, *Haste to the Wedding* follows after which John Evelyn is handed a small tree which he plants in commemoration of this nuptial event.

Episode 5: Smugglers and Other Gentry, takes place around the year 1760. At this time in Abinger many hollow lanes had worn down deep in the greensand and smugglers found these useful for moving their goods without notice. The smugglers open their casks outside Abinger's Hatch Inn and the jovial crowd sings *I'm Seventeen Come Sunday*:

As I walked out one May morning
One May morning so early
I overtook a fair pretty maid
Just as the sun was rising.
With my rum dum day
Fol de liddle day
Right fol lol de liddle lido.

In the third verse the singer asks the "fair pretty maid" how old she is. She replies, "I'm seventeen come Sunday." These words fit the tune of the same title which appears at the beginning and end of the first movement March in Vaughan Williams' *English Folk Song Suite*. Also in this scene several people of the landed gentry appear, one of which is Mr. Spence who is entertaining the "French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau who is in exile for his opinions, and…[his] mistress, Therese Levasseur." (ibid.) The Curate of Abinger attempts to converse with Rousseau on the topic of philosophy, but Rousseau mistakes him for a French spy and quickly leaves in terror. The gentry also depart so the villagers take another drink and sing the well-known Surrey folk song, *The Sweet Nightingale*:

One morning in May by chance I did rove,
I sat myself down by the side of a grove
And then did I hear the sweet nightingale sing
I never heard so sweet as the birds in the spring.

After the singing ceases the stage is vacant.

Episode 6: Towards Our Own Times, takes place during Queen Victoria's reign. The scene is outside by Abinger Church. The steward and the squire come out of the church while the rector and the farmers arrive to plan for a new church porch. "They look at plans and sing some verses of the 84th Psalm: 'How amiable are Thy dwellings.'…While the psalm is being sung all the performers of previous scenes assemble on the hill behind, and the hymn *O God our help in ages past* concludes the active part of the Pageant" followed by the Epilogue. (Forster 362-363)

One can imagine that Vaughan Williams' only original composition for this event must have provided a beautiful conclusion. In spite of the anthem's modest proportions, it effectively conveys the first four verses of Psalm 84 and verse 17 of Psalm 90. The original band accompaniment's instrumentation is: piccolo, flutes, oboe, bassoon, clarinets, alto clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, trumpets, horns, trombones, baritones, euphonium, tubas, string bass, and timpani. (Kennedy: *A Catalogue…* 146) This military band instrumentation was used due to the open-air performance of the pageant. There must have been quite a large number of singers to balance with the band, but the choral writing as mentioned earlier will have provided a very sturdy, strong vocal sonority.

As it turned out, Vaughan Williams was very sad to have to be absent from the Pageant. In the preceding months he had cut his foot and the wound developed into a poisoned abscess causing him to remain in bed for some time. He had been able to conduct a few early rehearsals, but David Moule-Evans conducted the performances. (UVW 201-202) In Jerrold Northrop Moore's pictorial biography of Vaughan Williams there is a photograph of the composer and E. M. Forster at Abinger to make plans for the Pageant. When Vaughan Williams saw the photo he said "I look like a rich and wily cattle-dealer getting round a simple rustic." (Moore 86)

E. M. Forster

Regarding the anthem itself, the instrumental introduction gives a contrapuntal treatment to the E flat major melody for the sopranos' and altos' beautiful opening phrase, "O how amiable are thy dwellings, thou Lord of Hosts." This phrase is repeated for, "My soul hath a desire" and then the men start the third phrase to join the women on "My heart and flesh rejoice in the living God." A modulation to G minor ushers in a new melody for "Yea, the sparrow…" sung by the men, then followed by the women, "and the swallow a nest…" in which the melody builds into the climax of the phrase (now in B flat major) "even thy altars, O Lord of hosts," concluding with a cadence on "my King and my God." This is accompanied by rich triadic harmony especially at the climax with parallel treble triads which must have sounded particularly effective with the band. A condensed version of this phrase is repeated for the text, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: They will be always praising Thee." A one-measure interlude moves smoothly to the key of D flat major which begins the section devoted to verse 17 of Psalm 90, "The glorious majesty of the Lord our God be upon us." Vaughan Williams introduces here the melodic opening of the hymn tune *St. Anne* tune in the instrumental preface to his majestic melody for these words, followed by "prosper thou the work of our hands upon us." With thick instrumental texture these words are sung with paired voices of soprano/tenor and alto/bass. A direct return to the key of E flat major presents the final climactic phrase, "O prosper thou our handiwork." A four-measure interlude returns to the first five notes of *St. Anne* and then "blossoms" into a melisma followed by four chords which lead into the first verse of *O God, our help in ages past*. In the tune Vaughan Williams has retained the long "gathering" notes at the beginning and ending of each phrase as is done in *The English Hymnal.* The tune's key at the conclusion of the anthem is in E flat major, unlike the usual C major which, being lower, puts the tune in a more comfortable voice range. Vaughan Williams, nevertheless, at the beginning of the tune concluding the anthem indicates "Voices in Unison." Perhaps at the Pageant only the choir sang this hymn tune. I feel certain this anthem made a stirring conclusion to The Abinger Pageant.

In Stephen Connock's 1995 discography there appear five recordings of *O how amiable*. The one by Alec Wyton and the Choir of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine I remember hearing over forty years ago. My recollection is quite favorable but specific observations have vanished with time. I own the recording of the Westminster Choir of Princeton, New Jersey. This performance and recording is good: the choral sound and diction is excellent, and the organ playing is generally clean, but I am somewhat annoyed by the omission, in the concluding hymn tune, of the long notes on the words: "past," "Our," "blast," and finally, "And." The long notes are retained at the beginning and mid-point of the tune, but I would have preferred them retained at the beginning and ending of each phrase as they are in the score.

The music for The Abinger Pageant is a good example of Vaughan Williams' care for and personal involvement in creating music for use in the activities of his local community, and many other works could be mentioned in this connection. *O how amiable* has certainly outlived the occasion for which it was composed and I have enjoyed my times playing and listening to this anthem. I hope we will perform it in my current church for years to come.

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RVW, Email and the Internet

Thanks are due to those members who have responded positively to the request to provide email addresses. Email is a cheap and convenient way of communicating and the Society invites members to pass their email addresses 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.

Please don't forget the Society's website which received a positive write-up in The Times recently. 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 far too many features to mention here. Members are urged to visit and see for themselves.

www.rvwsociety.com

Crossword Solutions:

Across: 1. The Robin's Nest, 7. Bulow, 8. Gustav, 9. Young, 10. Fool, 11. Rock, 13. Ansa, 14. Knot, 15. Child, 17. Sonata, 19. Spohr, 20. Sancta Civitas.

Down: 1. Tarry Trousers, 2. Robin, 3. Bold, 4. New Ghost, 5. Epstein, 6. Two Vocal Duets, 10. Fantasia, 12. Clinton, 16. Herel, 18. Cosi.

OUR HOPE FOR YEARS TO COME

by William Hedley

In the chronological list of Vaughan Williams' works at the back of Michael Kennedy's biography, the earliest to figure in a survey of the shorter choral works would be the *Three Elizabethan Songs*, first performed in 1913 but probably composed, so Kennedy tells us, between 1891 and 1896. The latest would be the extraordinary motet of 1956, *A Vision of Aeroplanes*. Rich indeed is the series of minor masterpieces the composer produced in the sixty or so years between these two works.

When I came to live in Southwest France in 1989 I brought with me many memories of singing and directing amateur choirs in the United Kingdom. They were for the most part traditional choral societies, so the big works were the ones which tended to feature most. Amongst the favourites – *The Creation*, *Messiah* – figured one or two English masterpieces, most notably *The Dream of Gerontius* and *Belshazzar's Feast*, though Delius' *Sea Drift* was a slightly more unusual choice one year. Curiously, though, I have no memory of ever singing a Vaughan Williams piece in England. Thinking of those choirs now, it's clear that *Dona Nobis Pacem* would have gone down well, both with singers and our audience. *Hodie*, too, would have been a good bet. *Sancta Civitas*, on the other hand, is from everybody's point of view a tougher nut to crack. But we never did any of these pieces, and as for the smaller works, well, the structure of the choirs' programming simply didn't allow for it.

One of the surprising things about the region in which I live is the wealth of amateur choral singing. British musicians have tended to be dismissive of the French as choral singers, and it is true that only now are groups appearing throughout France to challenge the better English or German vocal ensembles. Where I live there scarcely seems to be a village which doesn't have its own choir, and any decent sized town will certainly boast one or more. The problem is that conductors are in short supply, and anyone with the slightest experience is immediately snapped up. (This is certainly what happened to me!) Most amateur choirs here rehearse one evening a week, just as the equivalent would in the UK, but another favoured system is running the choir as a kind of course, several whole weekends of work over a year or more, with a series of concerts at the end. I work regularly with four choirs of both types, and over the years I have introduced each of them to a fair amount of English music. This of course includes Vaughan Williams, not the major works cited above, which are either too difficult or too expensive, but the shorter works which form the theme of this edition of the Journal.

Vocal Colore di Voce conducted by the Editor

Even amongst the shorter works there are those I am unlikely to put on. The *Three Shakespeare Songs*, for instance, are too difficult for the choirs I conduct at the moment. We might manage to learn the notes, but the shifting major and minor thirds at "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" in the second song would require a lot of work to bring out properly the composer's remarkable ear for choral colour as well as establishing the link demonstrated by his allusion to this text as a clue to the "meaning" of the featureless finale of the Sixth Symphony. The first song is truly "rich and strange" and there is a miraculous, darting lightness about the music he conjures up for Puck's words in the third, but so difficult to do justice to. *A Vision of Aeroplanes* would also be too great a challenge, and in any case, how can a conductor hope to bring a choir to an understanding of a piece if he doesn't understand it himself? Vaughan Williams' music is full of enigmas, and this piece is one of the most puzzling. What attracted him to this particular text? Why did he write such a fiendish organ part? Was it a wry joke for the organist Harold Darke, also the conductor of the St. Michael's Singers for whom he wrote the work? No, something more mysterious, perhaps akin to what moved him to compose other works we don't understand, even as we love, them, *Flos Campi*, for instance, or even *Merciless Beauty*. I think the beautiful motet *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* will remain on the shelf too: the composer's wish to produce what his teacher Parry would have described as "something characteristic" have led to a piece *so* characteristic that most French choirs would find it rather inscrutable.

I have conducted French choirs in only three works by Vaughan Williams. Of these, the shortest is *O Taste and See*. This adorable piece lasts barely two minutes and is therefore difficult to programme as it is over almost before it has begun. With one small group of singers I once placed it right at the beginning of the concert, singing from the back of the church. The solo soprano opening is very arresting in these circumstances, and the public tend not to applaud, adding to the magical atmosphere. The choir then enters and moves onto the platform in silence. The piece itself is of the utmost simplicity. The text is of two sentences only. The first is sung, as one of our correspondents points out elsewhere in this issue, to a pentatonic theme by the solo soprano. This is then developed in simple polyphony. The soloist's second phrase is similarly taken up by the choir, closing with a typically exquisite Vaughan Williams cadence. When giving the piece with a large choir it was much more difficult to place, but since there is always an encore at French concerts – called, perhaps surprisingly, not an encore, but a *bis* – I decided to give it then, and included the beautiful four-bar organ introduction printed as an option in the score.

O taste and see is a favourite with my choirs here. It is very easy to learn and the fact that it was composed for the 1953 Coronation is an added point in its favour as far as French singers are concerned. *Valiant-for-truth*, however, is another matter, longer, more involved, and above all, more challenging in its message. How can you convey to a group of French people, for example, the very particular world of Bunyan, and *A Pilgrim's Progress* in particular? Above all – and this is so important to an understanding of the piece – how can you explain the composer's lifelong fascination for the book? In fact, singers are immediately seduced by the music of *Valiant-for-truth,* and only slowly, stage by stage, does one delve into the words and what they mean. Just explaining the protagonist's name to non-English speakers is a challenge, and given that the character and what he stands for are so moving, both in Bunyan and in Vaughan Williams, one is frequently at a loss for words. Mr. Valiant-for-truth is called to God and the proof that the summons is genuine is contained in the words "That his pitcher was broken at the fountain." Vaughan Williams' use of parallel chords is wonderfully mysterious and evocative at this point, and these chords continue over an extended solo from the basses as Valiant-for-truth assembles his friends to bid them farewell. One section is worth quoting in full:

My sword, I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill, to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles, who now will be my rewarder.

This passage begins, perhaps predictably, with rather military fanfares, but a sudden *piano* at "My marks and scars…" changes the atmosphere, and at the words "…who now will be my rewarder" the music blossoms briefly into a six-bar polyphonic passage of remarkable beauty. The fanfares return as the trumpets, sounding "for him on the other side" bring this minor masterpiece to a dramatic and moving close.

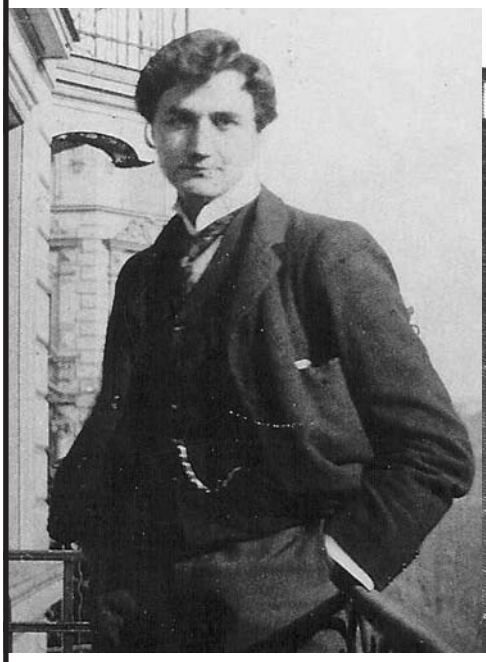
My most rewarding experience of Vaughan Williams with French choirs was also perhaps the most surprising, the motet *Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge*. This is one of Vaughan Williams lesser known pieces, and some of the most eminent Vaughan Williams scholars have been less than convinced by it. As with so many Vaughan Williams works it may be performed by a variety of forces. First of all there is the chorus, basically in four parts but often divided, with as many as seven voices at one point. There is a semi-chorus in four parts, but the score allows for this to be sung by a baritone soloist if the choir is a small one. It is true that this quartet sings for much of the time in octaves, but there are harmonized passages too, and even one in two-part counterpoint, and these would be sadly missed if only one singer were used. The whole piece is accompanied by an orchestra, though two thirds of the piece is over by the time it plays its first notes. The alternative to the orchestra is an organ, plus an ad lib part for a trumpet!

The piece is effectively a setting of virtually the whole of Psalm 90 and Vaughan Williams, with *The English Hymnal* behind him and *Songs of Praise* still to come, makes use of the hymn *O God our help in ages past*, whose words by Isaac Watts are inspired by the same Psalm. As the solo quartet intones the opening words of the Psalm the main chorus sing the hymn, to the tune *Saint Anne*, probably composed by William Croft, a striking effect. (Both words and music seem to have had some kind of special resonance for Vaughan Williams, since, as John Barr points out in his article, he used them again thirteen years later in his little anthem *O how amiable*.) The choral writing throughout is rich and luminous, and the composer cunningly divides the words between the two choral groups in order to point up the key moments of the text. Reflective in atmosphere for the most part, there are more dramatic moments too, such as the sonorous G major chords at "For when Thou are angry all our days are gone", and the *diminuendo* which follows, to the words "…we bring our years to an end as a tale that is told" is deeply affecting. When the orchestra (or organ) finally begins it comes as a surprise. In a completely different key – which cunningly disguises any slip in pitch – this transition leads to the final peroration ("And the glorious Majesty of the Lord be upon us…Prosper Thou our handiwork") treated polyphonically, with the *Saint Anne* theme resounding out on the solo trumpet.

When I gave this work with a choir some years ago a member of audience came to see me afterwards. Several singers had reported to me that he had been in tears during the piece, and he still was. Admittedly, he *was* English. "Forgive me," he said. "This piece always has this effect on me but hearing it now, here in France, it seems almost too much to bear." I know what he means. The work is beautifully written and full of ravishing sounds. The composer's control of pace and drama is masterly. His music seems to complement the words with uncanny skill. All the ingredients of a fine piece of music are present. But above all, in this work of high art, Vaughan Williams evokes a very particular, tiny world which those brought up in a churchgoing family cannot mistake. This world is characterized by the comfort, security and sense of community of the church. Whether the words say or mean anything to us is practically irrelevant: what matters is the memory. My visitor' memories were no doubt very vivid, as are my own, and involve my uncle counting the collection on the kitchen table. Such memories prompted Hardy to write *The Oxen*. How much was Vaughan Williams affected by memories such as these? I should like to know.

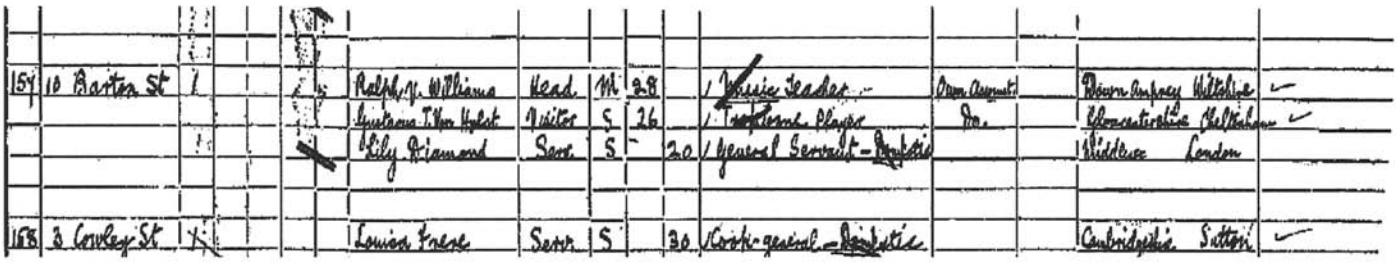
The Residents of
10 Barton Street, London, 31st March 1901

(uncovered by Robin Barber)



The 1901 CENSUS OF ENGLANDAND WALES is now available on the internet and shows who occupied a house, workhouse or Palace on 31st March 1901 as the Victorian era closed and the Edwardian began. The site can be viewed at: http://www.census.pro.gov.uk

The entry for 10 Barton Street, London, reproduced here, will be of interest to members.



154	10 Barton St	1			Ralph V. Williams	Head	M	28		Music Teacher		Own Account	Down Ampney Wiltshire
					Gustavus T Von Holst	Visitor	S	26		Trombone Player		Do.	Gloucestershire Cheltenham
					Lily Diamond	Serv.	S		20	General Servant - Domestic			Middlesex London
158	3 Cowley St				Louise Frere	Serv.	S		30	Cook-general - Domestic			Cambridgeshire Sutton

Recognising that the original may be difficult to read, a transcription of the entry has been provided of those present on that day. The headings in the census, refer to: relation to head of family, condition as to marriage, age last birthday, sex, profession or Occupation, Employment status, Where born.

Ralph V Williams : Head of Family / Married / age 28 / Male/ Music Teacher / Own account / Down Ampney Wiltshire.

Gustavus T Von Holst : Visitor / Single / age 26 / Male / Trombone Player / Own account / Gloucestershire Cheltenham.

Lily Diamond : Servant / Single / age 20 / Female / General Servant Domestic / Undefined / Middlesex London.

(There is no mention in the entry of the presence of Adeline Vaughan Williams.)

ROY TEED shares his RVW MEMORIES with us

Vaughan Williams became one of my heroes at an early age and remains so to this day. I am very proud to have met him and I treasure many memories. I have two photographs of him in my music room and look at them every day. I am looking forward to strong celebrations in 2008 for the 50th anniversary.

In 1934, after the deaths of Elgar, Holst and Delius, Vaughan Williams became one of the main leaders of British music at home and abroad. In the 1940s and 1950s he was the Grand Old Man and paved the way for succeeding generations of composers. By the force and strength of his personality he provided enormous support for many enterprises in addition to the legacy of his very large output of compositions.

From 1933 to 1945 I was a schoolboy and can remember singing hymns by Vaughan Williams, listening to the radio and to recordings. Our Junior School headmaster was a great enthusiast and played the latest Vaughan Williams recordings to us on his radiogram.

In 1943 I first went to the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall and heard the first performance of the Symphony No. 5 with Vaughan Williams conducting. I vividly remember the profound impression made by this music on a public torn apart by war. In those years I heard live performance of *Job* and the Sixth Symphony and was "knocked for six" by them.

I have sung in his choral works, notably *Five Tudor Portraits*, a lovely work which is grossly neglected. From 1949-1953 I was a student at the Royal Academy of Music and as a piano accompanist came to know and love many of Vaughan Williams' songs. The composer came to the Academy to give away the prizes, dashing about generally talking to students and staff and making encouraging speeches. He also attended rehearsals and student productions of his operas, enlivening the staff dining-room when staying for lunch. Ursula Vaughan Williams was elected on to the Board of Directors which was then chaired by their friend Sir Gilmour Jenkins.

In the early 1950s I went several times to the Leith Hill Musical Festival in Dorking and saw and heard Vaughan Williams conduct memorable performances of Bach's *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passions*, two works that he loved so much all his life. Many of his own choral works also featured in the programmes of many of these exciting concerts.

I first met Vaughan Williams when I was accompanying a rehearsal one day after he and Ursula had moved to Hanover Terrace. On another visit Vaughan Williams kindly looked at some of my compositions – afterwards courteously writing to my teacher, Sir Lennox Berkeley. He also kindly wrote me an encouraging note regarding a performance of a part-song of mine at the Royal Albert Hall.

I was privileged to go to the celebrations for Vaughan Williams' eightieth birthday, organised by the indefatigable Margery Cullen. For his eighty-fifth birthday the audience in the Royal Festival Hall rose to its feet!

I went several times to see the production of *The Pilgrim's Progress* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and loved it. In 1972 (the centenary year) the work was performed here in Colchester, conducted by Dr. Donald Hughes and produced by the late baritone Norman Tattersall, who also sang the title role. Ursula Vaughan Williams came along with much help and advice.

Other memorable events include a film about William Blake with song settings for tenor voice and oboe, recorded by Wilfred Brown and Janet Craxton. And in 1953 a set of part-songs entitled *A Garland for the Queen* was performed in the Royal Festival Hall. Ten British composers and ten poets participated in this tribute to the Queen. *Silence and Music* was Vaughan Williams' contribution, to words by Ursula.

Gerald Finzi and his wife Joy were great friends of the Vaughan Williams, and when Finzi gave some lectures at the Royal College of Music on "The Marriage of Words and Music" I was one of a team there to illustrate the music examples. I was all the more nervous as a young man seeing all the VIPs ranged along the front row in the Concert Hall – including, of course, Ursula and Uncle Ralph.

I remember that he liked Tippett's music for *The Midsummer Marriage* but could not remember what it was all about!

One of the last of the great occasions was the first performance of the Ninth Symphony at the Royal Festival Hall conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. This must have been one of the last times that the composer appeared in public, and when he died suddenly in 1958, aged 86, the whole nation mourned. I was privileged to go to the Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey where his ashes were interred. It was a truly wonderful and memorable occasion, a tribute to a great musician and a great man.

Vaughan Williams anecdotes are legion. Here are just a few:

When Ravel received a Doctorate at Oxford University Vaughan Williams suddenly appeared, sat down and gave a welcoming hug to the little Frenchman.

When listening to the compositions of avant-garde students in the USA he said "If you do happen to think of a good tune, do be sure to write it down."

To a query from an orchestral player: "It looks wrong and it sounds wrong. But it's right."

On his conducting: " Anything more than six beats in a bar and I become a windmill."

On sleeping through Poulenc's opera *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* at Covent Garden: "There were too many bloody nuns."

I should like to conclude by acknowledging my huge debt to Ursula who, since the 1950s, has been a wonderful friend and given me unstinting support and encouragement both in my work and during periods of personal difficulty. I am truly grateful for all her kindness and will remember it for the rest of my days.

BRITISH MUSIC AT THE PROMS

by Christopher Cope

By the time that you read this, the world's greatest festival of classical music for 2006 will have ended. This year, the Proms used two venues, the Royal Albert Hall and Cadogan Hall, with 81 classical concerts playing 116 hours of music.

Those interested in the Proms will have noticed that, in recent years, there has been a steady decline in the performance of British music. I venture to suggest that this is the worst year for British music since the Proms were established in 1895.

So what was on offer this year for devotees of British music? Of greatest length was Handel's oratorio *Alexander's Feast*. There were three works by Elgar, including his 2nd Symphony, Anthony Payne's reconstruction of *Pomp & Circumstance March* No. 6 and *In the South*. There was one short work by Britten, the *Colour Symphony* by Arthur Bliss and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, plus of course the usual works by Elgar, Parry and Henry Wood on the last night.

Members of the RVW Society will be astonished that not one single note of Vaughan Williams' music was played. But a host of other composers were also ignored.

It is only right and proper that music (both new and old) by Britain's contemporary composers should be performed. This year there were 15 works by 12 composers, an output of just over four hours of music.
And what of those four composers who have been knighted for services to music? There was one work by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, the Master of the Queen's Music, but nothing from Sir John Tavener, Sir Harrison Birtwistle or Sir Malcolm Arnold.

All in all, the amount of British music ran to just nine hours, under 8% of the total output. Imagine a French music festival playing only 8% French music. *C'est impossible*!

The Proms have this year marked three notable events, the 250th anniversary of the birth of Mozart, the centenary of the birth of Shostakovich and the 150th anniversary of the death of Schumann. There were 55 works by Mozart, 23 by Shostakovich and 11 by Schumann. Is this not a little over the top?

Although the Proms are, generally speaking, very good at marking anniversaries, this can be very selective. Last year, the Proms celebrated the centenaries of Tippett (12 works) and Lambert (two works), but William Alwyn was completely ignored. One would have expected this year's Proms to celebrate the 85th birthday of Britain's senior composer, Sir Malcolm Arnold. Furthermore, 2006 sees the 50th anniversary of the death of Gerald Finzi. No music by

Royal Albert Hall, London

either composer was played, "snubbed", as a music critic described the neglect of Finzi in the Daily Telegraph on 29th July. It would have been entirely possible to mark both events by cutting back on Mozart, Shostakovich or Schumann.

Let us turn to the music of Vaughan Williams. Looking back over 30 years, there have only been three years when no Vaughan Williams has been played at all, namely 1977, 1984 and 2006. There have been 26 performances of the symphonies, of which the 5th (with six performances) has been the most popular. However, numbers 7, 8 and 9 have only mustered one performance each.

The Lark Ascending, the *Wasps* Overture, the *Tallis Fantasia* and the *Serenade to Music* have all done reasonably well. Nevertheless, there have only been two performances of *Job*, *Valiant-for-truth* and *Toward the Unknown Region*. There was just one performance of the Tuba Concerto, the Oboe Concerto, *On Wenlock Edge*, the *Songs of Travel*, *Dives & Lazarus* and the *Five Mystical Songs*. Four relatively minor works were also played. However, with a total of 61 works in 30 years, the average is a miserable two per annum. Nevertheless, apart from this year there does seem to have been more Vaughan Williams in recent years than before.

Any devotee of Vaughan Williams' music would be disappointed to find not one single performance in that 30-year period of any of the operas, the *House of Life*, *Dona Nobis Pacem*, the Concerto Grosso, the Violin Concerto, the Partita, the Piano Concerto, *Flos Campi*, the *Five Tudor Portraits*, *In the Fen Country*, the *Oxford Elegy* or the *English Folksong Suite*. My list is by no means exhaustive, and some of these omissions – *Dona Nobis Pacem* amongst the choral works, for instance – are astonishing.

One can but hope that Stephen Connock will be successful in persuading Nicholas Kenyon, the Controller of Music BBC Proms, to include many neglected works by Vaughan Williams when we commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death in 2008.

The 27 works played at the Proms over 30 years should be compared with the output of Classic FM during the 12 months from July 2005 to July 2006. During that period, 38 works by Vaughan Williams were broadcast, including the first six symphonies and *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Furthermore, Vaughan Williams had seven works in the Classic FM Top 300 for 2006.

So how have other British composers fared over the last 30 years? Perhaps predictably *The Planets* has featured predominantly, with no less than 17 performances. Ten other works by Holst have been played, yet eight seasons featured no Holst at all.

Despite Sir Malcolm Arnold's enormous output he is now largely forgotten at the Proms. Of his nine symphonies, incredibly, just one has been played in 30 years. Only 11 works, in all, have been performed, of which the last (a film score) featured in the 1996 Proms. That coincides with Nicholas Kenyon's appointment. Perhaps Mr. Kenyon does not like the music of Arnold?

And what of other British symphonists? There has been one performance of a symphony by William Alwyn. Of Sir Arnold Bax's seven, only the 5th has been performed (1984). The last time that a symphony by Sir Lennox Berkeley was played was in 1978. The Bliss *Colour Symphony* was performed in 1993 and again this year. The symphony by Sir Hamilton Harty has never been played. Of the 12 symphonies by George Lloyd, only the 6th has been heard. And the magnificent Symphony in G minor by E J Moeran was last heard in 1938! Parry and Stanford, who between them composed 12 symphonies, have met with no success. Of Edmund Rubbra's 11, only two have been heard. Even Sir Michael Tippett has not done that well, with just six performances of his symphonies (one every five years). The symphonies of Havergal Brian, Alan Hoddinott, Robert Simpson, Sir Granville Bantock and Sir John McEwen have been completely forgotten, and many others too.

So what precisely is the problem with British music? A year or so ago, I wrote to Nicholas Kenyon enquiring why we had only heard one Bax symphony in 30 years. In his reply, he pointed out that when the 5th Symphony was played in 1984, the concert was probably the worst attended in living memory. As a result, it would appear that Mr. Kenyon will not countenance a Bax symphony being played again at a Prom. And yet, when you consider that in 1984 Bax was largely forgotten as a symphonist, is it really so surprising that so few people decided to attend that concert? There has, in more recent years, been a resurgence in interest in Bax symphonies, the 4th even reaching the Classic FM Top 10 a year or so ago. There have been a number of recordings they are generally far better known than they were during the 1980s.

In contrast, during the last 30 years, there have been 29 performances of Prokofiev's symphonies. All seven have been played. Shostakovich has done even better, with 82 performances of his symphonies. Only one of the 15 he composed has been omitted. And why should Schumann's four symphonies (19 played in 30 years) be considered more worthy than Parry's five, Stanford's seven or Bax's seven?

However, with all due credit to Mr. Kenyon, he did include Bax's symphonic poem *Spring Fire* in the 1996 programme and *November Woods* in 2003.

The lack of British music at the Proms is not a new problem. As long ago as 1981 the late Robert Simpson wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Proms and Natural Justice – A Plan for Renewal". Therein, he mentioned that the BBC took over responsibility for the Proms in 1927. Until 1960, the Proms programme was settled by committee. However, in that year, William Glock took over as Controller of Music and promptly abolished the committee, and since then, the Controller has had exclusive jurisdiction over the entire content. Glock was superseded by Robert Ponsonby in 1973 who was followed by John Drummond in 1986. Mr. Kenyon took over in 1996. The Controller is not only responsible for the Proms, but also live events and TV classical music. If questioned about the content of the Proms programme he will insist that he does consult. Nevertheless, as Dr Simpson pointed out in his article:-

> *The fact that a single individual has the complete authority, virtually unrestricted in time or scope, to decide all this detail, has been dangerous these 20 years, against the interest of equity and therefore not morally defensible… no matter how gifted or imaginative, how evangelistic for worthy causes, how inspired is one man, his idiosyncrasies and prejudices will feed themselves over a long period, try as he may to eliminate them.*

William Glock reigned supreme for nearly 14 years and was responsible for programming 718 concerts, containing nearly 3,000 musical items. During his tenure, no music was played by Howells, Leighton, McCabe or Stevens. Less than an hour's music in that entire 14-year period was played for Bax, Rodney Bennett, Brian, Bush, Fricker, Goehr, Rubbra, Searle or Stevenson. He programmed not one symphony by Bax, only a short choral piece and an orchestral arrangement of his oboe quintet. Nor were there any symphonies of Rubbra.

I do not have the whole of Simpson's pamphlet and am not therefore aware of his conclusions, but one thing is clear and that is that the problem lies not with the Controller of Music, but with the BBC and the system which has been established.

It is easy to forget that the BBC stands for the *British* Broadcasting Corporation. This year's Proms programme would lead one to believe that it should be renamed the European Broadcasting Corporation, because the majority of the music played was composed on the other side of the Channel.

As Simpson points out, the BBC is a publicly funded service. Today it has an income of nearly £3bn per annum. It can afford to award a three-year contract to Jonathan Ross, paying him an astonishing £18m. The Proms generate an income of £3.4m each year for the BBC, but cost £6.5m. Concerts are well attended. In 2005, ticket sales were 86%, with 42% of concerts sold out. Every concert is broadcast live on Radio 3. These concerts are repeated throughout the subsequent year. The Proms have no equal anywhere in the world. It is, therefore, a unique event, something of which we should be justly proud.

Of course, Mr Kenyon has an impossible job. He cannot please everyone. Nor can he include every composer. The problem, though, is one of balance. At present, there is an obsession with European music and, clearly, an antipathy towards British music.

There is, sadly, a hostility towards British music in this country. British orchestras do not tend to play British music. They certainly do not take British music with them when they go touring abroad. And now we have lost Richard Hickox, that champion of British music, who has gone to conduct the Sydney Opera.

In April, Radio 3 gave over the whole of its St. George's Day broadcast to English music. This impelled Norman Lebrecht to devote a whole page of the Evening Standard on 26th April to an extraordinary article headed "Why should we fly the flag for English music?" One quote will suffice as an example of his attitude toward English music: "Elgar, Walton and Bax wrote symphonies that trailed off after a movement or two." Then A. N. Wilson, writing in the Daily Telegraph on 5th July 2004, said that looking for a great Russian painter was like searching for the great English symphonic composer: he does not exist.

And yet at the same time, more and more people are discovering British music and are delighted with what they hear. Five years ago, virtually the entire week of the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester was devoted to British music. It was the most successful festival in the history of the Three Choirs. People have been badgering the Festival Directors for a repeat ever since.

At last year's Worcester festival, I heard works by Bairstow, Balfour Gardiner, Blake, Britten, Dove, Dyson, Elgar, Finzi, Goss-Custard, Handel, Harris, Holst, Howells, Ireland, Leighton, Lucas, Parry, Purcell, Quilter, Sumsion, Tallis, Tavener, Tippett, Tomkins and Vaughan Williams. And what a wonderful musical experience that was!

I attended my first concert 40 years ago this year. There is much that I have yet to hear in a British concert hall. I wonder whether I will ever get to hear a live performance of Moeran's G minor symphony? His only work performed at the Proms in 30 years was as the Sinfonietta in 1994.

People ask me if all this matters, as I can hear all the music that I like by listening to a CD. It is true that an enormous amount of British music has been recorded during the last 25 years, much of it for the first time. However, there is nothing to match the experience of a live performance, even if you have to endure fidgeting, talking, sweet papers, mobile phones and coughing.

In the last issue, Stephen Connock, reviewing the English National Opera performance of *Sir John in Love*, referred to it as "a life-enhancing experience". I would like more life-enhancing experiences at the Proms, by listening to neglected British music.

So what can be done? Someone recently mentioned to me that it was only a matter of time before Mr. Kenyon, a CBE, retires, followed with an automatic knighthood. However, I am told that he has no plans to retire. I fear that his eventual successor will be very much in the same mould as his three predecessors were. And, of course, he will be given absolute power to decide the programme for over 80 concerts for ten years or more. Heaven forbid that he should prove to be someone who loathes and detests Vaughan Williams. But that is the problem. If the controller does not like a particular composer, you can be sure that that composer's music will not be played.

To my mind, the British Broadcasting Corporation should give priority to British music. It is disgraceful that less than 10% of the output this year should be devoted to British music. It would be wonderful if we had a Prime Minister who loved British music and who would issue a decree stipulating a 25% minimum quota at the Proms! Those 29 hours would give us 20 hours more than we hear at the moment.

A radical solution would be to take away from the BBC the responsibility for running the Proms, but the BBC having done it for 80 years, the prospect of that happening is remote.

By all means write letters to the Controller, imploring him to play this composer or that. Years ago, I wrote to Mr. Kenyon's predecessor asking why we never heard a symphony by Parry or Stanford. He replied expressing his exasperation that so many people wrote to him in these terms. It never occurred to him that people wanted to hear music by those composers.

Perhaps one should involve the Arts Council for England. A correspondent to the Daily Telegraph recently wrote that he had attended a presentation by the Arts Council. This included ethnic minority musical traditions or music from deprived urban youth. There were Jewish folksongs, some bangra dance, and a rap artist performance poet was also featured. There was not the slightest indication that the Arts Council valued mainstream Western classical music.

I am afraid that I have no answers to this problem. I note the Delius festival in Bradford in July, an Arnold festival in Northampton in October, the new English Music Festival also in October as well as the Three Choirs Festival in August. But I and many others too want a lot more from the Proms. We are taxpayers and licence-payers. It is about time that the BBC started to listen to us.

Sir William Glock, BBC Controller of Music, 1959-1972

TOO MUCH WISHFUL THINKING

by Gavin Bullock

I read Eric Seddon's paper on Vaughan Williams and Christianity (Journal No.36) with interest and quite a lot of tooth grinding. With the permission of the Editor, I would like to try to refute Seddon's thesis, not because I object to his conclusion but because the reasoning used in his arguments is, in my opinion, deeply flawed.

Before discussing the piece, I should say that I am an atheist, but I was brought up in the Anglican tradition and was even confirmed, so I know a fair amount about Christianity, the liturgy and even understand a little about transubstantiation. Vaughan Williams, by background and education, would have been even more immersed in the Anglican tradition. For public schoolboys, God is compulsory. In his rejection of the existence of God, he would have done so from a position of considerable knowledge. In a sense, he could have been thought of as a young lapsed Christian. This has a considerable bearing on Seddon's second group of evidence. What he says is that if Vaughan Williams could understand and appreciate the Christian texts he set, including the profound mysteries, then he must be a Christian. I can understand Seddon's examples, so why not the composer? For example, he quotes Christina Rossetti's poem, *Dreamland*, and asserts that "…it is hard to imagine an atheist having any attraction to poetry such as this…".

> *Rest, rest, for evermore*
> *Upon a mossy shore;*
> *Rest, rest at the heart's core*
> *Till time shall cease:*
> *Sleep that no pain shall wake;*
> *Night that no morn shall break*
> *Till joy shall overtake*
> *Her perfect peace.*

This poem is a beautiful one – elegiac, lyrical and pastoral – but it is the everlasting soul in the last verse that is supposed to cause the atheist a problem. We are all steeped in the concept of some sort of existence after death and even if some do not believe in it, it does not mean the idea cannot be moving. Some might long for it to be true.

Seddon thinks that Vaughan Williams has not been assigned to the front rank of composers because he is seen as a setter of texts used for their value as literature, missing out on the higher theological mysteries. It would seem to follow that it is Christians, and devout ones at that, who determine the final worth of a composer. Seddon seems hoist by his own petard on this point because his argument is that Vaughan Williams *does* show a profound Christian understanding of his texts. I do not think he can have it both ways. I hardly think that the status of a composer would depend of the perception the audience as to his beliefs, regardless of the music. If that were the case, Wagner would be a footnote in musical history.

What made my teeth grind was the style of argument used by Seddon. His initial onslaught is on all the quotations about Vaughan Williams' atheism or agnosticism. He attacks each one and concludes, for one reason or another, that they are almost worthless. First, he says Ursula Vaughan Williams gives no "actual quotations" of his atheism. This is his wife! She lived with the composer and knew him intimately. What is an "actual quotation" from domestic life? Marriage gives us a depth of knowledge about our partner acquired over time which does not require corroboration and cannot be tied to time, date and circumstances. My partner loves *Coronation Street* but I could not say when I discovered this, or what her exact words were when I did. Yet my knowledge of this fact in unquestionable. I think Ursula Vaughan Williams' word should be accepted. Is she making it up? Later, he quotes her reporting of Vaughan Williams' quip that: "There is no reason why an atheist could not write a good Mass." Seddon goes into a series of nit-picking questions – no direct context. When? Where? To whom? Tenor of surrounding conversation? Did he say it once or several times? Spontaneous or provoked? Seddon describes these as 'important concerns'. Does he go round with a pencil and note pad or miniature tape recorder? Then he asks what it means. It does not mean the composer is an atheist. It does not mean that Vaughan Williams felt an atheist had ever actually written a good Mass. It *does* mean there is no reason why a good Mass should not be written by an atheist.

The quotation – put in context (Seddon does not give this context) – is:

Although a declared agnostic, he was able, all through his life, to set to music words in the accepted terms of Christian revelation as if they meant to him what they must have meant to George Herbert or to Bunyan. He had returned to Pilgrim's Progress*…as well as the unaccompanied* Mass in G minor*...He said cheerfully, "There is no reason why an atheist could not write a good Mass."* (*R.V.W. – A biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* – Ursula Vaughan Williams, Clarendon Paperbacks, 1964.)

Surely it is clear exactly what the quote means. He said it about himself. He was talking about his own Mass. Seddon conveniently omits to say that this quote follows immediately after mention of the Mass. His method is to dismiss the stronger part of a piece of evidence by saying there is no context, querying its apparently clear meaning or casting doubt on the integrity of the person making the remark (see below). This is sophistry. He also indulges in abnormal "literalism", refusing to interpret a word correctly when used in an alternative meaning:

It is important to realise, and it cannot be over-emphasized that the religion of Vaughan Williams's life was music… (Michael Kennedy)

He goes into quite a lengthy explanation as to why music cannot be a proper religion, as if Kennedy meant this literally. Kennedy was obviously using the word in one of its alternative meanings. I would assume that he meant something like the one below:

…a pursuit or interest to which someone ascribes supreme importance (OED)

Seddon is a published poet, and will have a large vocabulary and is used to manipulating words, so it is strange that he has not grasped that Kennedy is using the word in an alternative way. Incidentally, he treats Kennedy as a commentator and forgets that he was also a close friend of Vaughan Williams and has a good idea of his views. In fact, Seddon has a bit of a cheek to think he knows better than the composer's wife and a friend.

Bertrand Russell comes in for a bit of a bashing. Michael Kennedy corresponded with him in the late 1950s:

At Cambridge he [RVW] had had a reputation as "a most determined atheist", according to Bertrand Russell, who was at Trinity at the same time, and he was noted for having walked into Hall one evening saying in a loud voice. "Who believes in God nowadays, I should like to know?"

This quote provides evidence of repeated remarks by Vaughan Williams at particular times and in a particular place. But Seddon will have none of it. He tries to discredit Russell because he was an atheist actively hostile to religion and that he 'was not neutral to the topic of religious beliefs'. What he is saying is that Russell is a liar, or was incapable of telling the truth, because, as a 'hostile' atheist (someone who thinks religions are harmful – a perfectly defensible thing to be) he could not be an objective reporter in such a matter. To put the boot in harder, he says that 70 years is a long time to remember something, forgetting that events from our youth are often amongst our clearest memories.

Seddon, happy with his demolition job, concludes:
The obvious, simplest, and most reasonable conclusion is that if Vaughan

Williams ever had an atheistic phase, it was most certainly over by 1898.

This breathtaking conclusion sets the stage for the second part of his discussion – the texts. Taking *A Pilgrim's Progress,* he asserts that it would be transformed into an overwhelming masterpiece if a cross was included in the staging. He then considers the letter from Vaughan Williams to Rutland Boughton concerning the central character, Christian, being changed to Pilgrim:

I on purpose did not call the Pilgrim "Christian" because I want the idea to be universal and apply to anybody who aims at the spiritual life whether he is Xtian, Jew, Buddhist, Shintoist or 5th Day Adventist.

Another demolition job is on its way. This does not mean what it seems to mean but is actually dripping with sarcasm and satire. For reasons I cannot work out, so tortuous is the reasoning, this negates Vaughan Williams' "universal" idea. To my mind, the 5th Day Adventist is a joke. Vaughan Williams was prone to be flippant about serious things. And he did change the name for the reason he says. Where the withering sarcasm comes in, I do not know but I would ask, why is Pilgrim still called Pilgrim and not Christian? This is another example when Seddon takes a perfectly straightforward sentence and imbues it with all sorts of unlikely meaning (cf. the Kennedy quote).

Next, Seddon takes program notes of Bach's Passions as evidence of his understanding of Christianity. They are scholarly and what you would expect from a musician of his stature, both in musical and religious terms. It was at this point that I began to see what Mr Seddon's perspective is. He has this view of the agnostic or atheist mind, namely that it cannot understand religious ideas or symbolism and that is where the second part of his thesis falls down. He refers to *Five Mystical Songs* and in particular to *Love Bade Me Welcome*. This song, he says, makes little sense without a specifically Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. I looked up the poem and found I could understand the symbolism. I have never had anything to do with the Catholic Church but I do know about transubstantiation.

At the end of the exposition of his paper, Seddon considers *Dona Nobis Pacem* and finds references to the Eucharist in every nook and cranny. The opening movement is from the Catholic Mass anyway but there follow two movements setting poems by Walt Whitman. In *Beat! Beat! Drums!* there is mention of a bride-groom:

...no happiness must he have now with his bride

Whitman was not a Christian poet and I would take a bridegroom to mean just that. Seddon is now seeing Catholic symbolism everywhere he looks, and reads this as referring to Jesus. He says the second Whitman poem parallels the offertory. The quotation from John Bright's impassioned speech to parliament at the time of the Crimean War is "referring to the Passover, which is related, by typological significance, to the Eucharist". Vaughan Williams knew all this and deliberately designed it this way? I do not think so.

In his conclusion, Mr Seddon considerably tones down what he thinks he has proved. He has pushed Vaughan Williams closer to Christianity, not converted him. The main problem with this article is the lack of intellectual rigour in the arguments, rather obviously diminishing the evidence he disagrees with and amplifying the circumstantial evidence he likes – and it is all circumstantial – to often absurd levels. He over-eggs the pudding. I got the sense that he loves the music so much he wants Vaughan Williams to be more like himself in his beliefs, possibly because he does not feel he can relate to an atheist in a spiritual way, and much of the music is spiritual. I say that as an atheist.

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS IN BRENTWOOD CATHEDRAL

Two important concerts featuring the music of Vaughan Williams are taking place in Brentwood Cathedral over the next 12 months.

Brentwood is, of course, adjacent to the village of Ingrave, where Vaughan Williams first heard the folk song Bushes and Briars, in 1903, and this historical association has been exploited in previous concerts in the Cathedral. More recently, the roads in a new housing estate in Brentwood have all been given VW-inspired names – for instance, Greensleeves Drive, Tallis Way, Lark Close, Pastoral Way.

On 16th December 2006 Stephen King, organist of Brentwood Cathedral, will conduct a performance of Hodie, in a programme which will also include John Rutter's Where Icicles Hang and Elgar's Sea Pictures. Taking part will be Brentwood Cathedral Singers, Brentwood Choral Society, the Aurelian Symphony Orchestra, and soloists Susan Marrs, Simon Berridge and James Arthur. The choristers' part in Hodie will be sung by the Southend Girls' Choir, whose president, Sir David Willcocks, a former Organist and Master of the Choristers at Worcester Cathedral, trained the choristers there for the first performance of Hodie at the Three Choirs Festival in 1954. In July 2006, the Southend Girls' Choir was honoured to join other children's choirs in the Prom performance of A Little Birthday Music, especially written by the Master of the Queen's Music, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, to mark HM The Queen's 80th birthday.

The second concert, on 30th June 2007, will include A London Symphony, two works by Copland – On Zion's Walls, and Help Us, O Lord - and the Duruflé Requiem. For this the Aurelian Symphony Orchestra will be conducted by Eugene Castillo, the Director and Principal Conductor of the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra.

All members and friends of the Vaughan Williams Society are very warmly invited to attend these events. Tickets for either concert may be obtained from the Music Office, Cathedral House, Ingrave Road, Brentwood, Essex, CM15 8AT, telephone 01277 265288, and www.brentwood-music.org.uk has further details.

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

RELIGION

Eric Seddon's article "Beyond Wishful Thinking" does not live up to its title. On the contrary, it is full of wishful thinking, misinterpretations and unjustified conclusions. To begin with, he asserts that "there has been one scholarly opinion regarding the religious beliefs of RVW. It is taken for granted that he was an atheist as a young man, and later drifted into agnosticism *defined in a narrow and reductive sense."* (My italics). Nowhere does he produce the statements from scholars and commentators that would justify this statement. So from the start he is tilting at windmills. Instead he puts forward a number of quotations that do nothing to support his arguments, and reaches a final conclusion that implies that Vaughan Williams became a closet Christian who accepted without question Christian theology and doctrine. I use the word "implies" because he is careful not to state this unambiguously, and so gets the best of both worlds.

Seddon's interpretation of the quotations he uses is excessively blinkered and biased. To begin with Vaughan Williams' favorite quotation from *Corinthians.* What is there in this paragraph that is specific to doctrinaire Christianity? It expresses, in wonderful language, the importance of faith, hope and charity. Even avowed agnostics would hardly quarrel with this. A much more convincing conclusion is that Vaughan Williams was drawn to Christianity's moral teachings. Nothing here indicates that he accepted Christian doctrine.

The Bertrand Russell anecdote, Seddon claims, is "so partisan as to render it suspect". This is equivalent to calling Russell a liar, without actually using the word. It seems that Seddon is prepared to believe that only Christians can claim the moral high ground and all others are suspect. Russell, a philosopher and man of principle, would hardly need to make up such a story to support his own views.

The Plato quotation over *Sancta Civitas*: Seddon argues that Vaughan Williams, in using this, is not distancing himself from a specifically Christian interpretation. True, many non-evangelical Christians would support an allegorical reading of the text, but so would many agnostics and even atheists. We cannot draw from this any firm conclusion about the composer's religious beliefs.

Now the letter to Rutland Boughton explaining why he uses the name "Pilgrim" rather than "Christian". In his comments, Seddon uses the word "sarcasm" or "sarcastic" no less than six times, as well as other loaded words such as "jab" and "lampoon". Anyone who has taken care to understand Vaughan Williams' character would know that he was not given to sarcasm. That he had a schoolboyish, self-deprecating sense of humor is unquestionable, and he frequently used this to cover up serious statements and feelings (cf. his program notes for the 9th Symphony). To interpret the letter as a sarcastic jab is to misunderstand the intention. Would Vaughan Williams have chosen "Pilgrim" as the character for his opera out of sarcasm?

There are many more unjustified provocative statements in Seddon's article. I can't help wondering whether it was written tongue in cheek to stir up controversy. The only statement with which I am in agreement is "agnosticism may mean any range of positions". Quite. But there is nothing there to alter substantially the view of Vaughan Williams' beliefs as put forward by Michael Kennedy, Frank Howes, Byron Adams and others.

There is no doubt that Vaughan Williams was a man of very broad sympathies whose music constantly expresses spiritual values. Brought up in an Anglican environment, it is natural that he would be drawn to biblical texts and Christian symbolism. It is important to remember that during his formative years the Anglican Church was a very powerful tradition as well as a belief system. There is no contradiction in the assumption that he would continue to use the symbols after he had begun to question their literal truth. For him, this was a valid means of expressing truths that apply more universally than the doctrinaire Christian interpretation.

Michael E. Farman,
Palestine, Texas, USA

MORE…

I really did give Eric Seddon's article "Beyond Wishful Thinking" (June 2006) a chance to convince me about the depth of Vaughan Williams' religious beliefs, especially after the thoughtful introduction regarding the "conflicting and even contradictory" scholarship that has blurred the public's perception of other composers' lives and works. I'm sorry to say that I remain unshaken in my view of Vaughan Williams as an atheist-turned-agnostic, albeit a very Christian agnostic indeed.

Mr. Seddon cannot be faulted for the vigor and passion with which he presents his arguments, but after all was said and done, I found that they emerged as theories and opinions rather than anything factual enough to dislodge my own opinions. I was also put off by a certain smugness in his tone: "The obvious, simplest and most reasonable conclusion is…";"An atheist or agnostic of the Bertrand Russell variety…would never have written anything of the kind"; "The only proper conclusion we can draw is…"; "…like it or not, scholars will eventually have to accept that Vaughan Williams was a Christian composer…" Thus spake Seddon.

In summing up, Mr. Seddon asserts that "if Vaughan Williams is to assume his rightful place in the history of music...it is the Christian symbolism within his works that will have to be brought to light." I think that the purely musical strengths of these masterpieces will continue to do that job quite nicely. I'm not a proponent of such hard-line philosophies as Stravinsky's "Composers combine notes. That is all." I think that the creative process is far more intricate and complex than that. But I do believe that the impact made on a listener is primarily due to the musical choices made by a composer, and not by any political, personal or even religious beliefs he or she may espouse.

Might I gently guide readers to Page 3 of the same Journal in which Mr. Seddon's article appeared, on which Vaughan Williams himself is quoted apropos his music's "meaning": "My business is to write music…not to talk about it. And if my music doesn't make itself understood as music without any tributary explanation – well, it's a failure as music. It matters, of course, enormously to the composer what he was thinking about when he was writing a particular work; but to no one else in this world does it matter one jot."

Adam Stern
Seattle, Washington

MORE…

I enjoyed Eric Seddon's article in RVWS Journal No 36, although some of the theories presented stretched my belief more than a little, in particular the linking of *Dona Nobis Pacem* with the Latin Mass.

The proposition that Vaughan Williams was an atheist appears to have sprung from his statement at Cambridge University in the 1890s, as reported by Michael Kennedy, "Who believes in God nowadays, I should like to know?" As Mr Seddon says, this can be understood in many ways, depending on context, but one possible factor may have been overlooked. Perhaps Vaughan Williams was being deliberately controversial. I have a booklet which was published on the centenary in 1972, which contains a number of articles and tributes by persons who had known the composer. Among these is Sir Adrian Boult, who stated: "Ralph was a delightful person! He loved shocking people – that was one thing he really did enjoy. I remember overhearing him at a party once – 'Now I'm going to shock, Adrian' and he'd come out with some frightful remark."

Always accepting that Sir Adrian really meant "Ralph loved to shock people", perhaps his comment should be borne in mind by persons interpreting some of Vaughan Williams' pronouncements, which were probably tongue in cheek.

However, I cannot help but think that this correspondence, and some of the theories thrown up therein (not least by Mr Seddon) must be affording quiet amusement to one person who probably knows the answer. Has Mr Seddon read Ursula's recent autobiography *Paradise Remembered*? In it she states that at her first meeting with Vaughan Williams she was asked by him whether she was a Christian. On receiving a reply in the negative he "seemed pleased."

But there seems little doubt that Vaughan Williams was less of an atheist (if there *can* be degrees of atheism) than Frederick Delius, who wouldn't be seen dead setting any Christian text!

Michael Gainsford,
Leicestershire, UK

MORE…

In his major article (Journal 36) Eric Seddon claims "this article has shown that Vaughan Williams' atheist and agnostic phases were not quite as strong as scholars have asserted". I'm not so sure he ever had an atheist phase, and I suspect his agnostic phase lasted to the end of his life.

In her biography of her husband, Ursula Vaughan Williams writes "Although a declared agnostic, he was able, all through his life, to set to music words in the accepted terms of Christian revelation as if they meant to him what they must have meant to George Herbert or to Bunyan." Also: "He said cheerfully 'There is no reason why an atheist could not write a good Mass.'" From the above I read that he was an agnostic throughout his life: and the cheerful remark? Can an atheistic solo singer make an excellent job of singing *I know that my Redeemer liveth*? I think so. Professional writers and composers have a living to make and sometimes have to take a disinterested view of the job in hand.

As regards *Sancta Civitas* and that quotation from Plato's *Phaedo*, Ursula Vaughan Williams tells us "Ralph's own copy, in F. J. Church's translation, is heavily marked." This was the translation quoted by James Day, who tells me that he is a practising Anglican and not, as may have been assumed by Eric Seddon, an atheist or agnostic. In his own biography of the composer James Day writes "Vaughan Williams so frequently chose to set biblical or Christian texts, firstly because that was the imagery most familiar to the educated listeners in the world in which he grew up. But he showed equal enthusiasm for setting such writers as Whitman and Housman, who could in no sense of the term be considered as Christian. And finally, although he was an agnostic, he held that, to use his own words: 'The object of art is to stretch out to the ultimate realities through the medium of beauty…'" This statement totally begs the question as to what he, as an agnostic, meant by "ultimate realities", but it recurs constantly, expressed in differing terms, throughout Vaughan Williams' writings. The search for ultimate reality smacks of idealism and metaphysics – subjects which would have been much discussed by his fellow undergraduates in the early to mid-1890s.

It was in 1889 that Bertrand Russell met Alys Pearsall Smith, his first wife. She was on friendly terms with Walt Whitman. Soon, Russell put Vaughan Williams on to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and in turn Ralph Wedgwood and G. M. Trevelyan were reading him. They were already into Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* with its mystic idealism. Walt Whitman much admired Emerson who in his time had travelled from the USA to the UK to visit Carlyle, Coleridge and Wordsworth. His transcendentalism spills over into *Leaves of Grass*. And what of Holst? His Eastern mysticism with its search for ultimate realities might play a part.

Then we must not forget Vaughan Williams' father. Did Vaughan Williams feel some slight family obligation to set Christian texts to music? Maybe. Religion was the subject for discussion at the 1895 Seatoller Reading Party. On their first day, Sunday March 24, the prevailing subject of argument was Theology, and on their last day; Wednesday April 10 we have "Subject of discussion: the Universe in its Relation to God." By that time Vaughan Williams had departed to take the organist's post at St. Barnabas' Church, South Lambeth. Ursula Vaughan Williams tells us that he "disliked his work at St. Barnabas. He had given up taking communion, even as 'part of the show', so when a new vicar was appointed who made this a condition of his continuing as organist, he resigned his post with great thankfulness."

So what was the prevailing mood amongst his friends? This is summed up by G. M. Trevelyan who, writing in 1949 (*An Autobiography and Other Essays*), said:

> *Some of us youth were in those days more aggressively anti-clerical than it is worth the while of anyone to be to-day. The state of things at Cambridge in the 'nineties was a "leave over" from the hard fought struggle of the 'seventies and 'eighties, which had resulted in the abolition of religious tests and had effectively opened the University and its Colleges to new ways of thought: it was what we may call a "post-war period.." In those days I failed to realise that, while one should be very careful about the truth of what one believes oneself, there is no particular fun or glory in denial for its own sake.*

Trevelyan, when at Harrow, had refused to be confirmed, and whilst at Cambridge, as an undergraduate "took a spiritual pride in not going to chapel."

Was Vaughan Williams anti-clerical? Yes, I think so. Anti-religious, probably not, but do remember that it is said that the only book he took to the trenches of World War One was *Leaves of Grass*, his "bible". And in the last month of his life, speaking of Whitman to Michael Kennedy, he said "I've never got over him, I'm glad to say."

One poem from *Leaves of Grass* is *To Him That Was Crucified*. My reading of this is that it is from one seer to another: Whitman seeing Christ as a prophet and a visionary – as he saw himself. This is not a Christian stance to take.

I was much puzzled as to how to describe Eric Seddon's work which he calls an article. A friend point out that scholarly sermon might fit it best, and I agree.

E. J. Hysom,
Caldecote, Cambridge, UK

MORE…

I hope I can help ease Clive Elgar's frustration (Letters, Issue 32) by sharing a thought on the subject of Vaughan Williams and Religion.

First, may I state categorically that I am not a Christian. While it's true that I was baptised six decades ago, being then too small and innocent to argue the point, the fact is I have no belief in any god or gods at all, never have had and, bar some extraordinarily dramatic and compelling event to persuade me otherwise, never will have. Even if I were by some miracle to be convinced that an omnipotent deity along Judeo-Christian-Moslem lines did in fact preside over this randomly cruel and unjust world, I would despise the unconscionable villain for letting it get as bad as it is. But really, how anyone in this modern age cannot see that gods are created by man and not the other way round is a constant source of despairing amazement to me.

I do not believe in the existence of any supernatural being whatsoever; at least, not of a sort that any of us could possibly comprehend any more than a flea on the leg of a dog could comprehend the corridors of power at the RSPCA, and I certainly don't think the ignorant chuckleheads

who knock on my door from time to time claiming to know him or her personally have a clue about Life, the Universe or Anything.

I'm being over-cautious, of course. Following my inevitable demise, it is most improbable that enthusiastic Christians like Eric Seddon would feel moved to devote twenty close-packed columns to trying to prove, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that I was in fact One of Them (a Christian, I mean). After all, unlike our beloved Vaughan Williams, I am not prodigiously talented or even remotely famous, nor can I claim to be a thoroughly good bloke with a warm and genuine empathy for my fellow human beings as he was.

But then again, I could one day win the big one on Lotto and be so shocked and disorientated by my own good fortune as to give it all away to good causes. Unlikely – there's the missus to consider for a start – but theoretically possible. I bet I'd become a prime target then for closely-argued, post-quietus, multi-column Seddonisation, possibly even sainthood.

So let's be clear, just in case. I AM AN UNBELIEVER.

Although actually…O Lord, a huge Lotto win could be the compelling miracle I'm looking for. Just kidding, but it does illustrate a willingness to acknowledge The Possibility That One Could Be Wrong that distinguishes the Unbeliever from the Believer. Which is precisely why the latter will go shamelessly to any lengths to press his convictions on others while the former is always constrained by doubt, reality and common sense.

Having said all of which, it may surprise the reader to know that I recall with great pleasure and affection the school assemblies of my childhood in Britain with their hymns and prayers, and the church parades and services of my years as a cub, scout and air cadet. Even though, even then, I believed not a word of any of it, I appreciated (more in remembrance, perhaps, than at the time) the tradition, the benign, modest Englishness, the comfort of community, and the poignant human desire to believe in something beyond. In that sense it was indeed spiritual, uplifting and beautiful.

And I think Vaughan Williams felt the same way.

Ron Hoares
Birkenhead, Auckland, New Zealand

A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT

The subject of Ralph Vaughan Williams and religion appears again in the form of "Beyond Wishful Thinking" by Eric Seddon in the June 2006 issue of the Journal.

This is a most interesting, detailed and intellectually demanding article. I should like to offer some further thoughts, centred on the pentatonic scale.

To quote from the *Oxford Junior Companion to Music* by Percy A. Scholes, "tunes in many parts of the world are made out of that simple scale…" (pentatonic) "…the present writer, in his travels, has heard such tunes sung and played by Scotsmen, Chinese, Kaffirs, Zulus, Basutos, and others, and tunes in that scale are common also among the Japanese, the people of certain hill-districts in India, and others. Indeed it is, perhaps, the most widespread scale in the world." Thus, we see the pentatonic scale used by both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Lovers of the melodies of Ralph Vaughan Williams will be familiar with his use of the pentatonic scale, which crops up like daisies in the field of many of his works, both sacred and otherwise.

Considering two of his religious compositions, this 5-note scale is beautifully painted in the motet *O taste and see*, taken from Psalm 34, verse 8. There are also pentatonic measures present in the *Magnificat*, two examples being in the orchestral chords preceding the chorus "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee", and in the bell-like orchestral chiming before "Therefore also that Holy thing which shall be born of thee", from St. Luke's Gospel, Chapter 1, verse 35.

In the "Conclusion" section of Eric Seddon's article he writes "So, like it or not, scholars will eventually have to accept that Vaughan Williams was a Christian composer, at least in that his works are Christian."

Certainly, Vaughan Williams' texts may be Christian but in many cases his music may be more spiritual than Christian. In her biography of the composer, Ursula Vaughan Williams writes "He was an atheist during his later years at Charterhouse and Cambridge, though he later drifted into a cheerful agnosticism: he was never a professing Christian."

With respect to Eric Seddon's fine article, we have in Vaughan Williams a man who without question wrote much music to Christian tests. However, is it possible that he did not always write Christian music to these texts, but rather music which engaged with these religious writings in a conscientious and devout manner? Based on his diverse use of the multi-national pentatonic scale, should some of his music be considered, first, religious in a scrupulous and spiritual manner and, second, Christian, rather thane vice-versa?

As long as there remains interest in, and love for, the music of Vaughan Williams, people will question the nature of his true faith. They will hover, as I do, between one minute perceiving him to have been a Christian and next minute a "religious man".

E Anne Webb,
Ealing, UK

…A FINAL WORD?

I enjoyed Eric Seddon's long article on RVW and Religion, but feel that some pruning and fine tuning is needed. He pounces too heavily on Byron Adams' *en passant* reference to Brahms (June 2005, page 4). *Do* scholars "compare Brahms and VW as though their beliefs were in some way similar"? Their ambiences, Lutheran and Anglican respectively, limit the likeness to their not having unclouded faith like Bach's. My "Religion" letter (October 2005) indicates that Brahms' disbelief in immortality, cited in Seddon's note 25, was not settled or final. The disbelief conflicts with the "souls of the righteous" text in Part 3 of the German Requiem, and with the New Testament items in the astounding Part 6. Again, Eric Seddon recognises that "theological differences between…denominations" are peripheral to his article; yet he elaborates the stance of the Church of Rome, with which VW was not associated. Neither was the poet-parson George Herbert who hailed his "dearest Mother" Church of England as "the mean" 'twixt Protestantism and Rome. Why does your contributor claim that Aquinas "contributed the theology behind…transubstantiation…physically" when a) the doctrine was defined by the Lateran Council in 1215, before Aquinas' birth in 1224; and b) the 1994 "Catechism of the [Roman] Catholic Church", paragraph 1374, declares it to mean that "the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially" contained in the Host? "Substantially" does not mean "physically", and this is not the Anglican language of Herbert, though happily a reconciled understanding now exists.

Finally, it strains credibility to argue that VW's use of a chant attributed to Thomas Aquinas denotes his endorsement of an understanding which goes beyond the open words of the Angelic Doctor's *O Sacrum*, which in any case he is not setting. These arguments of Seddon are insufficient to support the unnecessary weight he imposes on them, when all that is needed is a lighter touch like Herbert's!

On such a lighter note, and having read Michael Gainsford's travelogue letter, I am saving hard to "let the train take the strain" of getting me to the Dorking AGM on October 8th!

Frank McManus,
Todmorden, UK

ALL GREEK

In his article 'Beyond Wishful Thinking' (*RVW Journal* no.36, p.17), Eric Seddon wonders which of the three translations of the Greek text that prefaces *Sancta Civitas* Vaughan Williams would have preferred. The *Phaedo* takes place during Socrates' final hours, during which he puts forward five arguments for the immortality of the soul. In this passage Plato employs the phrase *phainetai ousa*, which usually (but not invariably) means 'is shown to be' rather than 'appears to be' (usually *phainetai einai*); and since Socrates believed in the soul's immortality, that is presumably what Plato meant here. The word rendered both as 'honourable' and 'a fine thing' is *axion*, which has the general meaning of 'worthy', if that is of any help in deciding which translation is preferable. I hesitate to comment on the main thrust of Mr Seddon's argument, but I would just observe that it is quite possible to be deeply knowledgeable about and sympathetic towards a religion without necessarily subscribing to it. Anthony Milner made a heart-felt setting of Akhenaten's *Hymn to the Sun*, but I doubt whether he could have been described as an Atenist.

While still in the ancient world, may I say how much I agree with Robin Barber's review of the new recording of *The Wasps*? The music is superbly played, but the performance is ruined by what he calls the 'banal, vulgar dialogue'. It is true that Aristophanes can be bawdy or downright obscene, and we are told that Vaughan Williams was not averse to a ribald joke, but David Pountney has introduced coarse language where none exists in those parts of the text set to music. In doing this the whole point of the exercise has, in my opinion, been missed. The 1909 Cambridge student production was performed and sung in Greek, but Aristophanes would scarcely have understood a word or a note of it, so alien would it have been to the pronunciation and theatrical conventions of the late 5th century B.C. It may be viewed rather as an Edwardian period piece, much as Jonathan Miller's production of *The Mikado* depicts a company of players from the 1920s pretending (without much conviction) to be Japanese. As Michael Kennedy has aptly put it: 'Vaughan Williams's Athens is Edwardian Cambridge, with the folk songs blowing in from the fens'. The musical references to the then *passé* Mendelssohn and the ultra-modernist Debussy clearly place it in this period, as does the elegant but, to our ears, old-fashioned translation by H.J. Edwards published in the vocal score. Pountney's *EastEnders* version might work very well on the stage with a newly-composed score, and no doubt in a hundred years' time, with its trendy references to 'Gucci suedes and Armani shades', it will have become a period piece in its own right. In the meantime, superimposed on Vaughan Williams' Edwardian music, it seems grotesquely out of place.

Graham Parlett
London

THE CALIFORNIAN *PILGRIM*

On June 16th, I experienced the Trinity Lyric Opera production of Ralph Vaughan Williams` opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The Dean Lesher Center for the Arts is a large modernistic complex in Walnut Creek, California. It stays in the 90s on into early evening, this time of year, but inside it was pleasant. Up in the balcony before the performance, the conductor, John Kendall Bailey, kindly held an informal seminar on Vaughan Williams and his music. "The best place to hear performances of works by British composers," he pointed out, "is in England!" – alluding to how little is heard over here. While I've seen fine productions of Britten's *Peter Grimes* and the *War Requiem* in San Francisco, this was the first time I have seen anything live by Vaughan Williams.

I lack the technical training to critique a performance such as Jason Detwiler's as Pilgrim, beyond saying that I thought everything in the first three acts went very well. It was fun to watch, especially the *Vanity Fair* scene in Act Three, with Nicole Takesono as Madam Wanton. In imaginative hands, *The Pilgrim's Progress* certainly belongs on stage. Mister and Madam By-Ends earned a laugh from the audience at the beginning of Act Four; and even the Woodcutter's Boy did a creditable job, despite a bit of "stage fright".

Once in the Delectable Mountains, however, the stage went bare and it became clear that the opera would end in the 1951 version, rather than the 1922 version which I much prefer. There may be copyright issues that leave one no choice. Predictably, the Voice of the Bird was drowned out by the Shepherds; and the celestial alleluias at the end, lost in a fit of anxious second guessing. (As an American president once said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!") For an objective assessment of this work, I hope someone will stage *The Pilgrim's Progress* somewhere, someday, with its original climax. In my opinion, the first three acts were so well done, this production deserved the 1922 ending.

George Ihlefeldt
Carmel, California

A CELEBRATION AND A PREMIERE

I do not know how many members of the Society reside in or near the Pacific Northwest of the United States, but I would like to extend an invitation to them or to anyone else who is a partisan of Vaughan Williams' music.

On 21 January 2007, the Seattle Philharmonic and I will be presenting a concert celebrating Vaughan Williams' 135th birthday. (I realize we are celebrating roughly nine months early, but I couldn't bear to wait until our 2007-08 season!) This all-Vaughan Williams concert will feature four very different works: the *Overture and Incidental Music for "The Wasps"; The Lark Ascending; The Running Set;* and the *Ninth Symphony.*

I am particularly excited about the *Symphony No. 9,* as I was informed by its publisher, Oxford University Press, that ours will be the Northwest premiere of this brilliant and beautiful score. (Oxford further informed me that it has not been played on the West Coast for several decades.) I cannot imagine why the Ninth has been so unjustly passed over for the nearly fifty years of its existence, and the Philharmonic and I are proud to finally give it a hearing.

Adam Stern
Music Director, Seattle Philharmonic, Seattle, USA

RVW in AUSTRALIA

One of Sydney's most enterprising choirs, fielding up to 100 voices, is Collegium Musicum, part of the School of Music and Music Education at the University of New South Wales, formerly conducted by Patricia Brown and since her retirement by Sonia Maddock. They give about 3 concerts a year, and at the end of May attracted a large audience to a mighty Vaughan Williams program: *Dona Nobis Pacem,* and *Five Tudor Portraits,* two masterpieces which had their premieres a week apart in 1936.

Though practical considerations prevented use of a full orchestra, a string orchestra and pianist Lara de Wit did their best to bolster fine singing – sometimes slightly marked by caution restraining emotional spontaneity – by the keen choir and soloists Mark Donnelly (baritone for both works), Vivien Conacher (soprano for the cantata) and Jo Burton (mezzo-soprano for the John Skelton Tudor poems). It added up to an outstanding music event honouring Britain's greatest post-Purcell and pre-Britten composer.

A week earlier, Wendy Dixon – one of Sydney's most venturesome sopranos – and oboist Diana Doherty, principal oboist of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, performed Vaughan Williams' rarely heard *Ten Blake Songs* (1957).

Fred Blanks,
Greenwich, New South Wales, Australia

MORE…

I am writing to you as a new member from Melbourne, Australia, where I and another member, Hector Walker, are programmer/presenters with

the radio station 3MBS-FM. This autumn I am putting a large effort into including Vaughan Williams in my "Concert Hall" programme and perhaps some British night owls and our overseas members might be tempted to tune into 3MBS-FM on Monday afternoons, 1.30 - 4.30 pm (Melbourne time). The station broadcasts on 103.5 FM & its website is www.3mbs.org.au. The schedule is:

Oct 16: *A Sea Symphony*
Oct 23: *Toward the Unknown Region; Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis; Phantasy Quintet; A London Symphony*
Oct 30: *The Wasps;* String Quartet No.1*; Pastoral Symphony*
Nov 6: *Willow-Wood;* Symphony No.4
Nov 13: *English Folk Song Suite; Benedicite; The Lark Ascending;* Symphony No.5
Nov 20: *Old King Cole;* String Quartet No.2
Nov 27: *Flos Campi; Six Studies English Folksong (Robin Canter's arr. for Oboe d'amore & Strings); Te Deum; Sinfonia Antartica*
Dec 4: Piano Concerto in C; Violin Sonata; Symphony No.8
Dec 11: *Serenade to Music;* Oboe Concerto*; Magnificat;* Symphony No.9
Dec 18: *Five Tudor Portraits; Job*

In addition, Hector Walker has programmed the following works during his Sunday "Aprés-Midi" programme (2 – 4 pm):

Oct 15: *Job*
Nov 19: Viola Suite
Dec 24: *Hodie*

Finally, on November 29 in his Wednesday "Concert Hall" programme from 1.30 - 4.30 pm, our colleague Don Birch will be featuring the Mass in G minor.

John Barns
Lower Templestowe,
Victoria, Australia

READER RESPONSE
I sympathise to some extent with Clive Elgar (Journal No 36). I have been insulting Britten, Bruckner and others in these columns on and off for some time, fully expecting a tirade in their defence. As yet nothing has happened and I can only assume either everyone is sufficiently musically enlightened to agree with me, or that members think I'm 'beyond the pale' and that a response is beneath them.

With regard to Mr Elgar's first letter in issue No 34, I believe that in the long run the Journal gets the balance about right. No doubt a significant number of our members (not including me, I would add) *are* adept at reading the musical examples, which will be of great assistance to them.

My own skill at reading music is very limited. I can generally struggle through single lines of 'dots' (at times resorting to a trumpet!) but as soon as chords appear I'm lost. Reading counterpoint is beyond me, I'm afraid.

But that's perhaps my own fault. Has Mr Elgar ever considered acquiring a basic 'teach yourself music' book, and perhaps picking out some of the tunes on some sort of keyboard?

Michael Gainsford,
Leicestershire, UK

A LARK-IN, ANYBODY?
I am happy to report that the late, great Iona Brown won the recent Lark-In held in our family room earlier this summer.

Her recording of Ralph Vaughan Williams' rhapsody for violin and orchestra, *The Lark Ascending*, with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, competed, if that is the word, with eight other compact discs to gain top prize in the two-day tournament. Other violinists participating were previous winners Tasmin Little and David Nolan, together with Hugh Bean, Michael Bochmann, Sarah Chang, Barry Griffiths, Hagai Shaham and Christopher Warren-Green.

The field was divided into three divisions for the first round, very much like the World Cup, then being played. The judges – my wife, Dorothy, our son Paul and myself – listened to nine *Lark* recordings on Friday evening, abetted by a Spey Valley malt whisky (mild and totally appropriate for the *Lark*) and a decent Riesling (for my wife). The division winners, Ms. Brown, Mr. Bean and Mr. Warren-Green, played off in the finals the following evening, helped along by a slightly darker malt.

A granddaughter, Morgan, attended the finals but fell asleep and did not vote. Our two grandsons, David and William, had also been invited to attend. Sadly, though, their musical gifts, if any, have not yet announced themselves and the boys retired early to the basement to watch cartoons.

Discussion between two of the judges, both modestly talented former student string players, grew warm indeed. I voted for Hugh Bean. Paul explained his vote for Ms. Brown with elegant reasoning, the gist of which I am now unable to recall. My wife broke the tie by voting for Ms. Brown, "because I like her playing the best;" and that was that. We did agree, however, that Dr. Vaughan Williams was the real winner.

Fortunately, the malt lasted through the voting.

David J. Hatmaker,
Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA.

THOSE TOP TENS, STILL GOING ON…
It is amazing, unbelievable, incredible, incomprehensible, mystifying, suspicious as to why Michael Gainsford had nothing to say for or against G. F. Handel. Many of us have blind spots, but…

Graham D. Morris
Port Talbot, UK

ANOTHER BLIND SPOT?
As an amateur astronomer of long standing, I was sorry to learn that Pluto has been demoted and is no longer a 'proper' planet.

However, one beneficial outcome could be that its totally unnecessary namesake recently appended to Holst's masterpiece may also be deservedly committed to the musical rubbish heap.

Michael Gainsford,
Leicestershire, UK

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

Concert Reviews

***The Pilgrim's Progress* in California**

On June 17th my wife and I attended a wonderful and, to me, astonishing performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Walnut Creek, not far from where we live here in the San Francisco Bay Area. This was the very fine inaugural production of the newly-formed Trinity Lyric Opera, headed by Alan Thayer. The event was astonishing because until I read about it in Mr. Thayer's article in the Journal (February 2006) I never dreamed I would see a live performance of this great work in my lifetime, and especially not "in my back yard"! This was the first time *The Pilgrim's Progress* had been staged here on the West coast and was, I suppose, one of its very few performances in all of the United States. Thank you! And thank you again, Mr. Thayer for all the hard work, determination, stress, and fundraising it took to make this happen! You have achieved your stated goal of demonstrating that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is operatically viable and truly stage-worthy. I sincerely hope that the local movers and shakers of the opera "scene" were paying attention.

The first notable and excellent thing about the production was Jason Detwiler in the role of Pilgrim. His singing was rock-solid and his acting was heartfelt and emotionally engaging from beginning to end. (We have seen him before in our local Opera San Jose in roles such as Don Giovanni, and John Proctor in Ward's *The Crucible*.) In my judgment, his portrayal of Pilgrim was very comparable with that of Gerald Finley on the Hickox recording. I'm trying to banish the melancholy thought that, things being what they are, Mr. Detwiler may not have another opportunity to perform this role. May I be proved wrong!

The staging of the opera was simple but effective, with much credit due to stage director Adam Flowers, production designer Patrick Kroboth, and lighting designer Pamela Z. Gray. The set featured a slightly raised dais painted with a large reproduction of the signature graphic used for posters and other publicity materials: a stained-glass-looking image of John Bunyan, pen in hand, gazing out the window of his jail cell. On either side of the dais were movable silver reflective columns that were used to good effect in a number of configurations throughout the opera. John Kendall Bailey led the orchestra very ably. The orchestration had to be reduced somewhat due to the size of the pit. There were about forty players, with the harpist perched on the front left corner of the stage and (I think) the timpanist opposite her in the front right corner.

Except for the Vanity Fair scene, Pilgrim and most of the other main characters were costumed in attire that suggested Bunyan's 17th-century era. Supertitles were used throughout, though I could make out most of the lyrics without looking at them. Here is a brief rundown of the most salient points of the performance itself. With such a large cast it is difficult to give due credit to everyone. All the singing was good, and some of it was excellent.

Bass Kirk Eichelberger, as John Bunyan, provided a solid, well-sung beginning (and later, ending) for the opera, rising from his writing desk to address the audience. At Pilgrim's first entrance, Mr. Detwiler created an immediate gut-wrenching mood of near-despair as he staggered about under his heavy burden – an effective piece of stagecraft that quickly draws the audience into the story. Jason Sarten as the Evangelist was a quiet, authoritative presence, and the scene with the fearful neighbors was done cleanly and convincingly.

The House Beautiful scene was suggested with a simple, but effective backdrop and, of course, a cross. I am sure this scene is a top ten favorite with many Vaughan Williams fans (including myself), as it sets us thinking about the rapturous Romanza from the 5th symphony and about the drama of redemption and salvation that drives Bunyan's allegory. Mr. Detwiler brought great emotional intensity to this scene as he collapsed in front of the cross before being relieved of his burden by the Three Shining Ones, sung beautifully by Diane Squires Weber, Nicole Takesono, and Michele Detwiler. After Pilgrim was welcomed into the house by the Interpreter (Adam Flowers) and the chorus, Jason Sarten again appeared as Watchful, singing his reassuring but wary interlude. The Act II, Scene 1 arming of Pilgrim was stirring and vigorous. The choir sang forcefully and well in "Who would true valour see," that most characteristic of Vaughan Williams tunes.

Act II, Scene 2 with the demons and Apollyon, which has been a problem spot since the early productions, was staged very convincingly. As the armed Pilgrim enters amid the wailing, swaying chorus and writhing black-clad dancers who grasp at his feet, Apollyon appears as a looming, fantastically costumed, larger-than-life shadow projected on a medium-sized translucent scrim at mid-stage. Pilgrim begins in front of the scrim, surrounded by the threatening demons but then steps behind it to project his shadow as he and Apollyon come to blows. As I understand it, this kind of shadow play is what Vaughan Williams had in mind for the scene. It works! It did not look in the least bit awkward or contrived. In this scene John Minágro sang very convincingly as Apollyon, with an effective use of amplification.

Following the intermission, the Vanity Fair scene began with loud whoops and hubbub from the company before the curtain went up. The lively, effective stage action featured singers dressed in an eclectic mix-up of ancient, modern, and unusual costuming. Tenor Adam Flowers, in a flashy sports coat and dark glasses, sprinkled gold dust about as he gave a vivid and appropriately oily rendition of "Come and buy!" To me, this solo calls to mind Sportin' Life's *It ain't necessarily* so from *Porgy and Bess*. It also calls to mind Vaughan Williams' later experience in writing film scores, which enabled him to use a slicker, flashier musical style to great effect here. It is surely an indicator of his genius how, in the overall structure of the opera, this scene fits together so well with the scenes that are more musically reminiscent of *The Lark Ascending* or the *Tallis Fantasia*. Kirk Eichelberger appeared again as a very sinister, masked Lord Hate-Good, slouching in his seat of authority surrounded by his doxies before viciously sentencing Pilgrim to death. As the "march to the scaffold" chorus began, Pilgrim was briefly dragged offstage, presumably roughed up by the guards, then dragged back on, now wearing a hood, and thrown on the floor writhing in pain (shades of Abu Ghraib?) The staging here was especially effective, as each singer kicked, spat upon, or otherwise abused Pilgrim as they filed past into the wings. At the last, a cute little girl (the Detwilers' daughter, in fact) stopped to pull the hood from Pilgrim's head before Lord Lechery grabbed her and whisked her offstage.

Pilgrim's "My God, why hast thou forsaken me" was superbly sung with great acting skill and great emotional intensity. This is surely one of Vaughan Williams' very finest inspirations! Again, bravo Mr. Detwiler!

Boy soprano Max Vicas began Act IV with his forthright, steady portrayal of the Woodcutter's Boy. Pilgrim then entered with a smiling, relaxed demeanor that perfectly mirrored the restful, pastoral music. Adam Flowers and Michele Detwiler made good use of their comedy skills and extensive stage experience as the snobbish Mr. and Madam By-Ends. Then, another miracle of musical transition and integration as this "late" scene flows seamlessly into the scene with the Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains written so many years earlier. Here, Andrew Park, Nikolaus Schiffmann, and John Minágro sang with beauty and subdued intensity. This was followed by the scene that always affects me the most deeply: Pilgrim's summons by the Celestial Messenger (sung by Joe Raymond Meyers) to the celestial city and his crossing of the deep waters of death. The staging was, again, simple but very effective, with an anguished, struggling Pilgrim bathed in rippling blue-green light at the back of the stage. Again, Mr. Detwiler's singing and emotional projection

were superb. I hope the rest of the audience were as moved by it as I was.

And then the glorious closing scene and echoing Alleluias! Vaughan Williams showed a keen theatrical sensibility in ending the opera with John Bunyan's valediction, which was convincingly sung by Mr. Eichelberger. It gently eases us down a bit from the ecstatic vision of the gates of paradise. A foretaste of heaven, indeed!

At this point I will contribute my "two cents worth" regarding Vaughan Williams and religion, taking a cue from Eric Seddon's thought-provoking article "Beyond Wishful Thinking" in the last issue of the Journal. Frankly, it is inconceivable to me after seeing this work performed how anyone could reasonably maintain that Vaughan Williams chose Bunyan's allegory for this project of a lifetime, that he devoted so much time and musical/dramatic genius to bringing it to the stage, that he manifestly poured so much of his heart into it, *solely* because of its literary and cultural significance and that the theological content of *The Pilgrim's Progress* had nothing to do with it simply because of the accepted view that he was an atheist in his youth and an agnostic thereafter. I agree with Mr. Seddon that we should re-evaluate what we really "know" about this, based on the evidence.

Vaughan Williams was clearly not a conventional churchgoing believer. I don't think his intent was to evangelize the opera-going public, nor do I think one must be a believer in order to fully appreciate *The Pilgrim's Progress*. On the other hand, how many other high-quality, large-scale musical works portray the central Christian narrative of sin, redemption, and salvation as clearly and compellingly as this opera? Certainly, the Bach Passions, which Vaughan Williams loved so dearly and which he led in performance so many times. But they were written for performance in church, in order to uplift and edify believers. Vaughan Williams' audacity in making an *opera* of Bunyan's very, very "religious" story and insisting that it be presented *on the stage* (we've heard about how dead-set he was against relegating it to cathedral performances) is amazing! In addition to Bunyan's narrative, Vaughan Williams added psalms and many other Bible passages to the libretto.

If this were not enough, he has John Bunyan at the end of the opera offer the Gospel to the audience and, without irony, exhort them to take it to heart. By the time we got to Act II of the June 17 performance, I half expected a representative of the local governing authority to step onstage and halt the performance for violating the statute forbidding excessive use of Bible verses in an opera! Seriously, my wife and I felt that we were in the presence of a deeply moving work of genius by a composer who was great of heart and great of soul and who certainly transcended the restrictive label of "agnostic." I look forward to reading the further studies of Eric Seddon and others on this important topic.

So, to conclude my review, the few shortcomings of the performance were understandable for a first production of a newly-formed opera company and did not, in my opinion, detract from the effectiveness of the production. The brass section was a bit rough at times and missed a few accidentals. Occasionally the sung offstage parts were difficult to hear – for example, "The Lord is my shepherd," sung by the Voice of a Bird (Diane Squires Weber) in Act IV. The 35-voice choir did well with the straight-ahead choruses such as "Who would true valour see," but they nearly came to grief in the more difficult and intricate chorus that opens the Vanity Fair scene. Here, Mr. Bailey skillfully held the orchestra and singers together until they reached firmer ground again.

Mr. Thayer has announced Thais for the next season of Trinity Lyric Opera, and says he would like to stage *Dialogues of the Carmelites* sometime in the future (and – who knows? – perhaps another Vaughan Williams opera). I wish many blessings upon him, and I wish him good luck with his fund-raising. I commend and thank him again for his remarkable achievement in bringing *The Pilgrim's Progress* before the public!

Kerry Lewis,
Santa Clara, California

The Lark Ascending in London

On a perfect summer's day in July the violin soloist Hilary Hahn visited London. The concert, given by the English Chamber Orchestra under Roy Goodman, was part of the Barbican's *Mostly Mozart* series although the Mozart piece, his 41st Symphony (*Jupiter*), did not involve Miss Hahn. Her contribution was to be in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and, more to the point for readers of this journal, *The Lark Ascending*.

There was not a spare seat to be seen in the huge auditorium as the concert began. There was a lively start with Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* for strings and then we were to see what Miss Hahn was capable of in the Mendelssohn piece. This work was completely unknown to me before the concert and was clearly a challenge for the violin soloist but Miss Hahn took it in her stride, her face composed, her off-duty moments spent looking round at the orchestra, nodding, staying connected with them until it was her turn to come in again. I looked forward to see what she would make of the *Lark*.

For me, Miss Hahn's playing came alive after the interval with the Vaughan Williams piece. As she strode back onto the stage there seemed to be more of a buzz in the audience this time, more of a welcome in the applause. As before she stood out confidently at the front of the orchestra, wearing an orange top and a long silver-blue skirt, seeming to shimmer against the black backdrop of the orchestra, the very essence of summer. There was silence and Roy Goodman raised his baton.

Quietly the orchestra eased into the first few bars of the piece. Miss Hahn swayed and rolled, and found the first few notes of the lark's song. Again her face was composed and serene, as though this was just another day at the office for her.

The orchestra slipped away into silence, Miss Hahn was on her own and the lark was airborne. At this exquisite point in the performance, two or three members of the audience decided that they were going to have a good cough. "Better out than in", so they say. Well, not at a crucial moment in a performance like this. Can't people control themselves for a while, at least until a louder passage of music? It might be thought that this would have been off-putting to the performer. If it was, she didn't show it. The girl from Baltimore swayed and rolled, and the lark soared even higher, leaving behind the earthly world and its encumbrances. Presently Roy Goodman's baton raised a couple of inches and the orchestra were back. The coughing died away and the rest of the performance was without mishap. At times Miss Hahn's instrument seemed to be playing itself, so effortless was her playing. The next time the orchestra died was at the end of the piece, and Miss Hahn was uninterrupted this time, guiding the lark's song with skill and sensitivity as it gradually vanished from our hearing, soaring, not just into the sky, but seemingly to another place, not of this world. At last Miss Hahn's arm was poised motionless in mid-air, Roy Goodman's baton frozen in space, and they waited like statues for a few seconds as though the slightest movement would break the spell.

Then thunderous applause. A bouquet was brought on for Miss Hahn and she tried to extract a flower for the first violinist, only to find that it seemed to be super-glued into the rest of the bunch. She struggled but wouldn't give up, eventually presenting the flower to the recipient with a charming smile, a reassuring moment of fallibility.

The climax of the concert was Mozart's 41st, and Roy Goodman was enjoying himself now. He threw himself into this work with gusto, leaping around the podium, looking with glee into the orchestra's eyes, as though the previous works were just a warm-up for this. At the end of the concert the audience left in an upbeat mood having had a wonderful evening's entertainment.

In the foyer Hilary Hahn's CDs were on sale, including her recording of the *Lark* with the London Symphony Orchestra reviewed in the last RVW Journal. Purchasers of these CDs could have them signed by her after the performance. She was in for a long evening as by my reckoning there were over a hundred people queuing up to take advantage of this

opportunity. Being a skinflint myself I had not parted with the required £16, however as I left I caught a glimpse of Miss Hahn chatting with friends, having by now changed into jeans and T-shirt, and I was struck by her ordinariness. In her performance and personality she can be at once ecstatic yet composed, perfect yet fallible, exceptionally talented yet ordinary. She is to be commended for taking the *Lark* on tour to Germany and France, with the same orchestra and conductor, and so promoting Vaughan Williams' work overseas.

This was just another day in the office for Hilary Hahn. But what an office – what a day!

Robert Shave,
Sussex, UK

Choral music in Edinburgh

This concert, which took place on August 17, was one of the shorter offerings in the busy schedule of this year's Edinburgh Festival. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Festival Chorus were joined by sixteen young soloists for the *Serenade to Music* and two of that number for *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Both pieces were conducted by the Chorus's conductor David Jones.

I am not sure how many in the well-filled Usher Hall were prepared for such an electrifying performance but that is what they got.

The opening bars of the *Serenade* set the tone of quiet reflection and the piece developed from there. While not wishing to detract in any way from the other fifteen soloists, the singing of Ha Young Lee was in a class by itself, her effortless soaring into the heights bringing out the magic of that most magical Shakespearian text and also Vaughan Williams' genius in its musical interpretation.

While the Chorus had to content itself with being part of the audience for this part of the concert, their time soon came in *Dona Nobis Pacem*, aided by the fact that their own conductor was in charge of the orchestra.

Their performance was, in a word, masterly, showing an understanding of the words and music which brought passion and great tenderness to their interpretation of Whitman's words. Whether by accident or design, in the present climate, the central section – the *Dirge for two Veterans* – spoke for and to many in the hall and the choir's reading of these words and music brought tears to these eyes anyway.

The soloists in this part of the concert were Gary Magee, who brought a sonorous sadness to his words. Claire Booth, the soprano, seemed to lack a little in the soaring pleading of her part – "…dona nobis pacem" – especially when joined by chorus and orchestra.

I hope that this is but a foretaste of things to come in 2008 and the powers-that-be in Festival circles will take notice of the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams' death and mark it appropriately.

Graham W. Smith,
Livingston, West Lothian

Delius Festival – June 2006

Film director Ken Russell made a surprise appearance at a screening of the film *Song of Summer* during the festival of music held in Bradford 'celebrating the composer Frederick Delius, his inspirations and influences'. First shown by the BBC in 1968, the film charts the story of the young Eric Fenby who left Scarborough for Grez in France to become the amanuensis to Delius who by that time was blind and paralysed. Maybe in part due to the anecdotes of the director, but I had rather forgotten how funny the film was, particularly in the scenes featuring Percy Grainger, and the unaccredited appearance of Ken Russell as the miscreant priest. Coupled with the Yorkshire Television production *Eric Fenby's Return to Grez* the evening became a touching tribute to Fenby.

A far as the music making was concerned then the festival was a triumph. To hear the rarely performed Violin Concerto was reason enough to visit Bradford. Tasmin Little clearly relished playing the piece. On the same programme was *Sea Drift, Walk to the Paradise Garden* and Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*. Opening the concert was a real rarity, *Rossini on Ilkla Moor* by Eric Fenby. Interesting this, as Fenby's music seldom gets a concert airing. (He also wrote the score to Alfred Hitchcock's *Jamaica Inn*). Conducting with unbridled energy was Rumon Gamba, familiar from his recordings of film scores, including those of Vaughan Williams. His conducting was the topic of much conversation. On the one hand he was thought to have some way to go on understanding the subtleties of Delius, but a great number shared the view that he injected excitement and movement into pieces too often languorously performed.

Yvonne Kenny and Piers Lane gave a delightful recital of songs and piano music by Delius, Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Satie and Grainger; there was a recital of Grieg, Delius and Ravel sonatas from Tasmin Little and Martin Roscoe as well as further recitals from Julian Lloyd Webber, John Lenehan and Tasmin Little. David Atherton conducted the BBC Philharmonic in a grand concert of Grainger, Warlock, Delius and Elgar. There had been questions about the acoustics in the St. Georges Hall, but from the stalls it was fine, adding a stately resonance to the *Enigma Variations* in the Radio 3 broadcast. Acoustics aside, it was intriguing being in this old building and wondering about the young Delius sitting in the very same hall.

There were talks by Lyndon Jenkins, a photographic exhibition, and a live contemporary take on world music with a concert by Najma Akhtar, fusing Indian ghazal with jazz.

We have in a large measure Tasmin Little to thank for bringing this festival forward and the whole event was much enhanced by writer and broadcaster Lyndon Jenkins' witty and informative talks.

There was a rather snifty review in one of the nationals about the performance of the Violin Concerto. Reviews are, of course, only a personal statement. It is difficult enough as it is to fill seats at a concert, let alone the duration of a festival, so reviewers should be careful not to imply criticism of an entire event. That aside, I went back to archive recordings of the concerto by May Harrison and by Albert Sammons. No problems with the vibrato and portamento in those performances! And what a classic it is by Albert Sammons!

The last Delius festival was way back in 1962. Delius was, of course, born and educated in Bradford and although he spent the greater part of his life abroad, I rather think that the town is coming to recognise that he was indeed one of their own. There is interest in Delius and a gap of forty-four years between festivals has been far too long.

The concertos remain neglected. The American connection is to be explored. The lovely *Florida Suite* cries out to be performed in Bradford Cathedral. Negro spirituals, the Duke Ellington sacred concerts….

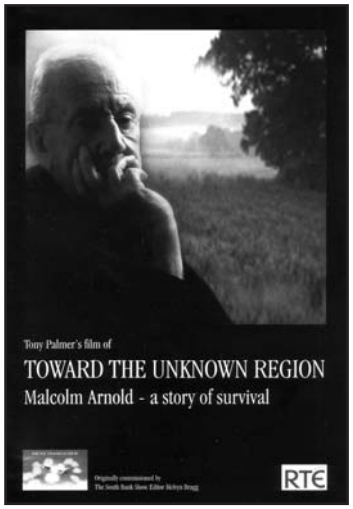
This festival, similar to many others, was the result of work of many committed people. The Delius Society deserves a mention, and credit to them for holding their AGM, lunch and talk during the festival.

Robert Rush,
Forest Gate, London

DVD Review

TOWARD THE UNKNOWN REGION
MALCOLM ARNOLD – A story of survival.
A film by TONY PALMER
Isolde Films ISO 001

This article, completed some weeks ago, was originally meant as a joint DVD review and *Music You Might Like* feature. Sir Malcolm Arnold's death on September 23 at the age of 84 has forced a rewrite and a change of focus.



The bare facts of Arnold's life have been well documented elsewhere and are currently being recycled in countless obituaries. They come over in Tony Palmer's superb film with startling vividness. He was a precociously talented youngster, and as much at home in jazz as in "serious music" – his own term. He was an outstanding trumpeter, playing for several years in the London Philharmonic Orchestra where he was frequently to say to himself "I could have written this better than him." And so he did. He was both foolhardy and generous with the money he earned, most of it, presumably, from his career as composer of film music. "Socialising" – eating and drinking to excess as well as chasing women – contributed to the breakdown of his first marriage and soon he left London to live in Cornwall with his second wife whom he had married when she became pregnant. The child – his fourth – was born autistic, and his second marriage soon went the way of the first. He moved to Ireland where, as his biographer, Paul Jackson, states, "his real problems finally exploded into near-disaster." The drinking only increased and he attempted suicide by taking "every pill in the house". He spent time later in a psychiatric hospital from which, in an extraordinary episode stranger than any fiction, he was rescued – this recovering alcoholic – by a couple who ran a pub. He lodged with them for some time in a state of increasing degradation, but eventually left (or was thrown out, versions of the story differ) and spent the final years of his life living in Norfolk with Anthony Day, described in the film as his "companion and manager".

Toward the Unknown Region is a skilful mix of archive film, interviews and recorded music. The insert note states that the film "does not shirk the darker side of Arnold's life" and this is certainly true. Some scenes are truly shocking, notably footage of Arnold in what appears to be some kind of hospital room or other such institution holding forth on matters so important to him that his anger repeatedly explodes in instants of bared-teeth, hissing fury. Then we hear terrible stories of his descent into filth and degradation ("…he tends to smash up the things that can help him") from his daughter and a most poignant interview with his son, visibly bewildered by the total breakdown of relations with his father.

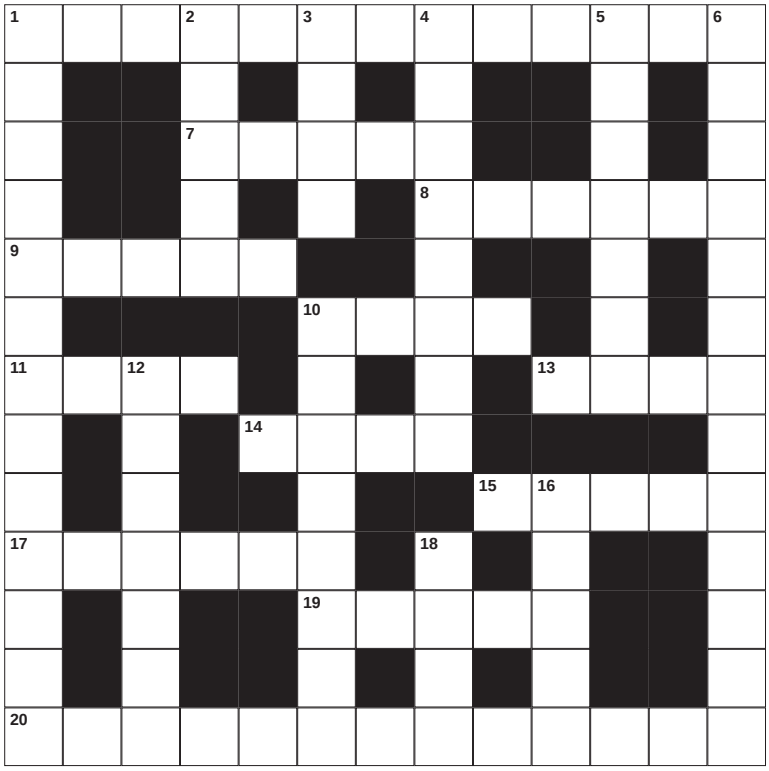
Life with Malcolm Arnold must have been an exciting experience, but there can be no doubt that he must have been insufferable at the same time. Brilliantly gifted, he wanted – perhaps even needed – everything doing for him. His biographer states that whilst his first wife would have done what she could to dissuade him from drinking, and at the same time seeing virtually to his every need, his second wife was more likely to leave him to his own devices whilst having a drink with him herself. Whilst there seems no reason for any adult to have to rely on this kind of total support, there are any number of factors which explain, even if they do not excuse, his behaviour. First of all, he was diagnosed as schizophrenic at the age of twenty-one. Then we hear him recounting a terrible list of deaths amongst his siblings, including one by suicide and another, the death of his sister from cancer, which, he says "almost destroyed me." One of his own children did not survive, and his last son was born autistic, a factor which his already unbalanced mind took as a kind of divine punishment.

To counterbalance this was his extraordinary musical brilliance, a facility which allowed him to compose directly into full score at white-hot speed with virtually no corrections. He made an enormous amount of money from film music, but his life is one of increasing frustration at the lack of recognition of the more serious side of his output and the extracts we hear in this film make this neglect all the more difficult to understand. A passage from the Symphony No. 2 underlines one aspect of Arnold's music, the extraordinarily rapid mood changes within a short space of time. It is tempting – but too simple – to ascribe this to his psychiatric illness, but it is an aspect of his music one encounters time and again. It was the coupling of the first two symphonies on disc played by the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland conducted by Andrew Penny with alerted me to Arnold's music some ten years ago and I have been increasingly devoted to it ever since. But any lover of this music has to be content to listen to it on CD as live performances have been rare indeed. The extracts in this film are carefully chosen to give both an overview of the composer as well as an indication of the wide variety to be found. I think any lover of Vaughan Williams' music would respond positively to the Guitar Concerto, for instance, which Julian Bream describes as "touching" and showing the composer's more "sensitive" side. Yet there are many examples of this aspect of the composer's character: he says himself that the second subject should always be "feminine", and though one might question his analysis (or terminology!) there is no escaping the beauty of the second subject passages in many of the symphonies. A work which was new to me was the Cello Fantasy, heard in the film in an extended, rocking, pizzicato passage. I will certainly be seeking it out and can only urge members to do so also. Adventurous listeners will find much to satisfy them in the symphonies. The Fourth, for instance, composed in the wake of riots at the Notting Hill Carnival, features Latin American instruments and rhythms, and the tragic Fifth, evoking memories of musician friends and others who had died too young and too soon. (One critic wrote about this work, so Arnold tells us, "The least said the better.") The variety is remarkable, and the last – the Ninth! is in some respects the most remarkable of all, austere, spare, much of it written in only two parts, a real valediction. Vocal music figures only rarely in his output, making his choral work *The Return of Odysseus* all the more important. The fact that I did not find it so convincing as most of Arnold's other music when I reviewed it in the last issue should not deter members, particularly when the performance was so successful.

Towards the end of the film we see Sir Malcolm Arnold in the last phase of his life, living in Norfolk in the care of Anthony Day. They are, says Arnold's biographer, "…the ultimate Odd Couple. Anthony is gay and Malcolm isn't…Anthony needs somebody to look after and Malcolm needs somebody to look after him…Anthony took on the job when none of the family wanted to…" though he does add that Arnold had told all his family to "sod off" by this time. Anthony Day does everything for Arnold, sparing us no detail of his daily tasks. He helped Arnold out of debt and says of him "He looks forward all the time. He never looks back. He's happy." At the end of the film we hear a quotation from John Clare as Arnold describes his life as heading "toward an unknown region". He certainly seems by this time to have achieved a kind of peace. It was late in the day, but I think anyone who views this film – and it is highly recommended – will be thankful that he did eventually encounter the person capable of helping him find it.

William Hedley

RVW Crossword No. 23 *by Michael Gainsford*



Across

1. RVW's juvenile piano composition (3, 6, 4)
7. Hans von, German conductor (1830-1894) (5)
8. First name of RVW's great friend (6)
9. Henry the Poacher's description (Folk song in *Norfolk Rhapsody* No 2) (5)
10. Silly person appearing in *Hugh the Drover* (4)
11. The piece by RVW's Russian contemporary, *not* Elvis Presley (4)
13. No doubt RVW's latin teacher told him that this means 'handle' (4)
14. Tippett's garden (4)
15. Young sounding librettist of *Hugh the Drover* (5)
17. RVW wrote one in A minor (6)
19. This composer sounds as if he came from a mushroom (5)
20. Choral work from 1923/5, and favourite of RVW (6, 7)

Down

1. Second of *Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties* of 1908 (5, 8)
2. ***** Hood and the Pedlar (folk song arranged by RVW) (5)
3. Character of a Young Farmer, a Young Sailor, Princess Royal, and General Wolfe (4)
4. The third of *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* (3, 5)
5. He did a bust of RVW (7)
6. *The Last Invocation* and *The Love Song of the Birds* (1904) (3, 5, 5)
10. There is one on a theme of Tallis (8)
12. Not the former US President, but Gordon who sang in the first performance of *Epithalamion* (7)
16. **** * come. A very early effort from 1882 (4, 1)
18. **** fan Tutte (4)

ANSWERS PAGE 5

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RVW and Bunyan

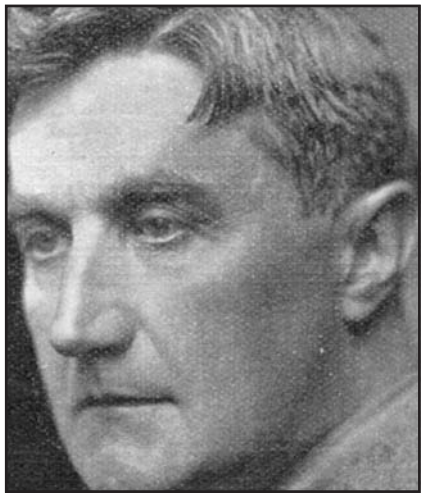
Deadline for contributions

December 18 2006

Call for Papers

The June 2007 edition will concentrate on the Ninth Symphony

Deadline for contributions
April 16 2007



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.