

Journal of the RVW Society

No.39 June 2007

In this issue...

- Adam Stern
conducting the 9th
page 3
 - Robin Barber's
recommended 9th
CDs
page 11
 - Stephen Connock
in RVW's footsteps
page 23
- and more . . .*

Albion Records cuts its first CDs

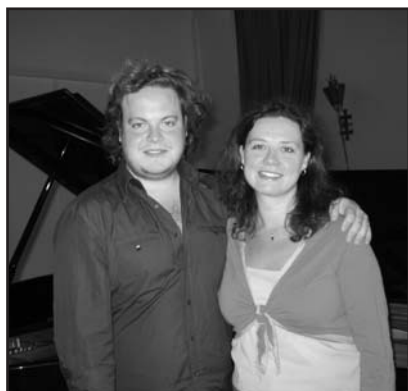
Another milestone for the RVW Society was achieved in the Spring of 2007 when two CDs were produced on behalf of Albion Records. Leading British singers joined Iain Burnside (piano) to record forty Vaughan Williams songs. This project was only possible because of the generous support of sixty-nine members who donated over £6,000 towards the recording. The Roll of Honour is appears inside.

THE SKY SHALL BE OUR ROOF

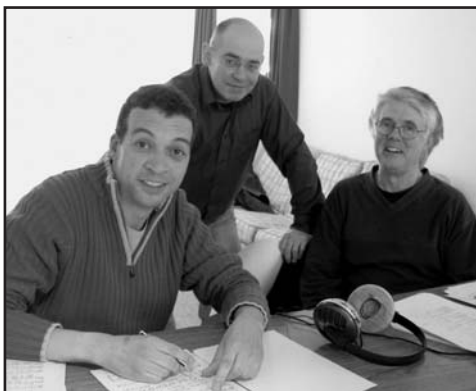
The first CD, *The Sky shall be our Roof*, will be issued in October 2007 and numbered ALB001. It consists of ten songs from *Hugh the Drover*, all wonderfully expressive, two songs from *Sir John in Love* and seven songs from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Only the *Pilgrim* songs and *Greensleeves* have been recorded before in these arrangements by the composer, and the songs from *Pilgrim* only appeared on an Argo LP RG20, long deleted. The performers on our Albion recording are Sarah Fox (soprano), Andrew Staples (tenor), Juliette Pochin (mezzo) and Roderick Williams (baritone). The recording engineer was Michael Ponder and the recording venue was Potton Hall in Suffolk.

TO DAFFODILS

The second CD, ALB002, is called *To daffodils* and contains mostly early songs by Vaughan Williams. Two – *Rondel* and *To daffodils* – we believe are world premiere recordings. Roderick Williams and Sarah Fox share the majority of the songs and both were very impressed with their quality.



Andrew Staples and Sarah Fox



(L to R) Roderick Williams, Iain Burnside and Michael Ponder

Perhaps even now the time has arrived

The CDs will retail at £11.99 and Albion Records will be assisted by a distribution company to ensure worldwide sales. Members will be able to buy the records at £10.00 plus postage. We very much hope all members invest in these superb CDs. If this happens our next recording project – the complete piano transcriptions of Vaughan Williams – can be realised. Our long held vision becomes reality at last!

One of the soloists in our Albion song project, Juliette Pochin, will be giving a recital at the Society's AGM on Sunday October 14 2007. See page 14 for details.

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From the Editor . . .



John Barr, in his thoughtful piece on the Ninth Symphony a few pages on, chooses to focus on the extra-musical elements of the work. I remember well, as a schoolboy, learning that “programme music” could be defined as music containing, or inspired by, extra-musical ideas. Simple, and accurate as far as it goes, I’ve used this definition myself with students many times since. John Barr lists for us, with appropriate acknowledgment to Alain Frogley’s important book on the Ninth, some of the references to extra-musical matters marked into the composer’s manuscript sketches. They turn mainly around the Wessex of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

What are we to make of this, from a composer who, as John Barr also reminds us, vehemently rejected any notion of “meanings and mottos” in his work? It represents, at the very least, a paradox. Vaughan Williams’ insistence that we listen only to the music and set aside any association with ideas is diligently reported by commentators, but few take it seriously. It would in any event preclude all but technical commentary, and art does not really work like that. And crucially, it flies in the face of the evidence. The notes which make up the *Pastoral Symphony* are of unsurpassed beauty, but its status as a great work of art is enhanced when heard as a reaction to wartime experiences and as a memorial to those who died. And we should not forget that in connection with this very work Vaughan Williams *did* allow an extra-musical association to be known, that of the Corot-like landscapes of Northern France. So why did he let this one pass whilst refuting so many others? Why did he so frequently choose to divert attention from the obvious depth of feeling in his music by means of descriptions so offhand as to be flippant? I don’t think there is an answer to these questions, any more than there is, in spite of the detailed and learned debate still stalking the pages of this Journal, to the question as to why he set so many sacred texts – and so beautifully – whilst professing to hold no religious faith himself. One is left to conclude that there are few composers quite so secretive and mysterious as Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Without wanting to hint at some kind of sensational “dark secret”, I suggest that his music communicates ideas and feelings which he dared not express in words. The work which transformed my teenage enthusiasm for the composer into something closer to obsession was *Flos Campi*. What a strange idea, to compose an orchestral piece punctuated with references to the *Song of Solomon*! Like the *Pastoral Symphony*, this enigmatic work makes its point at once more and less clearly than words could do. Is this one of the reasons why he employed a wordless choir? I think Vaughan Williams knew the words very well, but chose not to utter them.

I wrote in my very first submission to this Journal that the closing pages of the Fifth Symphony should be prescribed to those trying to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. The final scene of *Riders to the Sea* would, not, I think, bring the same comfort. The bleak hopelessness of this tableau is unique in Vaughan Williams’ output, though in the mother’s calm and stoical acceptance of the cruelty of her fate we glimpse that faith in the nobility of the human spirit in which the composer, even in the darkest moments, never quite lost faith. I welcome submissions on any aspect of this remarkable and too rarely performed masterpiece for the forthcoming issue of the Journal.

The subsequent issue will be the first of 2008, the fiftieth anniversary of Vaughan Williams’ death. For that issue I would like to invite all those members living outside the United Kingdom to reflect on the composer’s place on the international scene. The subject is a very open one, and perhaps I might add a few more guidelines next time. And it is certainly not closed to British residents who will have their own ideas on the subject. Appreciating the order of the notes or searching for “meanings and mottoes” is equally challenging in Tamworth, in Tokyo or in Tallinn.

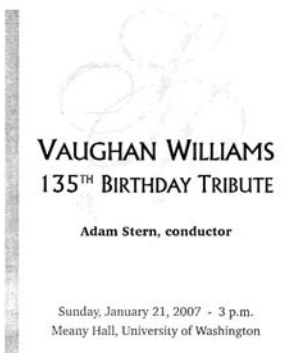
William Hedley

CONDUCTING RVW'S NINTH: A (VERY) PERSONAL JOURNEY

by Adam Stern

“HAVE YOU TRIED No. 9?”

My relationship with Vaughan Williams' music began 32 years ago, when I was beginning my fifth year of college. Until that time, my knowledge of his music was limited to the *Fantasia on “Greensleeves”*, and that solely because it was played every weeknight on a Los Angeles classical radio station as theme music for their 11:00 programming. My ignorance wasn't a question of having heard some of his music, disliking it, and practicing avoidance thereafter; I simply had never experienced it, whether on recordings, on the radio, or in the concert-hall.



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
135TH BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

Adam Stern, conductor

Sunday, January 21, 2007 - 3 p.m.
Meany Hall, University of Washington

PROGRAM

Overture and incidental music from “The Wasps”

1. Overture 2. Entr'acte 3. March past of the kitchen utensils
4. Entr'acte 5. Ballet and final tableau

Magnificat
Teresa S. Herold, contralto
The Northwest Boychoir

The Running Set

— INTERMISSION —

Symphony #9 in E Minor

1. Moderato maestoso 2. Andante sostenuto
3. Scherzo: Allegro pesante 4. Andante tranquillo

To preserve the integrity of the music, we kindly request that you do not applaud between movements. Thank you.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (he pronounced his first name as “Rai”) is often touted as the greatest British composer since the Henry Purcell. In a long and extensive career, his music was noted for its power, nobility and expressiveness. He seemed to represent the very essence of “Englishness.”

Vaughan Williams' broad musical output included symphonies, operas, film music, ballet and stage music, song cycles, church music, and choral works. Early on, the composer established a solid reputation as a folklorist. He helped to edit both the *The Oxford Book of Carols* and the 1906 edition of the *English Hymnal*, and composed several hymns that are now worldwide favorites.

At 42, Vaughan Williams volunteered to serve alongside a younger generation during the First World War, first as an ambulance driver in the Royal Army Medical Corps and then in the Royal Garrison Artillery.

The emotional impact of the war upon him, including damage to his hearing and the loss of close friends, is evident in the intensity of expression throughout his compositions, most notably in the *Pastoral Symphony* and in the opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Vaughan Williams was awarded the British Order of Merit in 1938 in recognition of his many accomplishments.

Program Notes

The Wasps
(Overture and incidental music)

In 1908, a year before releasing *The Wasps* upon the musical world, Vaughan Williams spent three months in Paris studying orchestral technique under Maurice Ravel, one of the leading lights of the Impressionist movement.

Although already in his mid-30s, Vaughan Williams had actually composed little apart from a few songs (he was an avid collector of English folk songs), and a couple of minor orchestral pieces.

But the composer had also been wrestling for some time with his ambitious First Symphony. His went to Paris in an attempt to breathe new life into his musical voice, which he felt was “too impenetrable and lacklustre.” He wrote that he was anxious to “acquire a little French polish.”

That next year, Vaughan Williams got his chance to put his studies to work when he was asked to write incidental music for a performance of Aristophanes' great satire, “*The Wasps*,” at Cambridge University. It was to be his first venture into writing incidental music of the sort used for plays, radio and films.

In attempting to find his own voice — or, at least, to polish it — Vaughan Williams succeeded brilliantly with *The Wasps*. The

(PROGRAM NOTES continued on next page)

SEATTLE PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA • 2006-2007 PAGE 1

All of that changed when I was 19 years old. I made a new friend at school, a fine pianist whose specialty was accompanying, with a considerable background in choral music. The director of her high school choir, by all accounts a man of limitless energy and big ideas, would give his young charges major works to learn and perform. During the period in which my friend studied under him, the director programmed two major works by Vaughan Williams: *Dona Nobis Pacem* and *Hodie*. I must have looked blankly at her when she told me this, and confessed that not only was I unfamiliar with these pieces, but with Vaughan Williams' output altogether. She immediately spirited us to the music library, found LP recordings of both works (Abravanel's of the former, Willcocks' of the latter), and there we sat for two hours, our crania gently gripped by headphones, she basking in the contentment of familiarity, I experiencing the delight and awe that accompany

profound discovery. That was the day Vaughan Williams and I finally met, the day he attained the position of my favorite 20th-century composer — a position from which he need never fear being toppled.

Within about six months I had obtained scores and recordings of all his symphonies, plus choral works, songs, chamber music and miscellaneous compositions for orchestra. I also read several biographies and analyses of his music: *RVW: A Pictorial Biography* became a favorite bedside volume. I remember being charmed and amused when I came across a quote which summarized Vaughan Williams' feelings about an early encounter with Wagner's music: “There was a feeling of recognition as of meeting an old friend which comes to us in the face of great artistic experiences.” Charmed, because this quote perfectly mirrored what I had felt upon discovering his music; amused, because it was a reminder that one doesn't always agree 100% with one's heroes: I have disliked Wagner since first hearing him as a small child, and this aversion has, if anything, increased steadily over the years!

By the end of that school year, I had conducted a work by Vaughan Williams for the first time: the Overture to *The Wasps*. One year later, when it came time to fulfill the requirements for my Masters degree, I had to prepare and conduct an entire concert with the college orchestra. Cheerfully ignoring the sage advice of several teachers, who urged me to make the “big” work a symphony by Beethoven or Brahms, I selected the following program:

COPLAND: *Fanfare for the Common Man*

VARESE: *Octandre*

MOZART: Concerto No. 2 in D for Flute and Orchestra

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Job - A Masque for Dancing*

Job turned out to be the perfect choice. The orchestra, whose members had found *The Wasps* somewhat “lightweight” one year earlier, realized from the first rehearsal that they were playing a masterpiece. I was also fortunate in having both a particularly fine concertmaster and principal oboe for that performance; their solos shone brightly. The audience, which was, I'm sure, innocent of *Job*'s riches prior to the performance, reacted with considerable enthusiasm. There was an added bonus to the performance: when I contacted Oxford University Press about the hiring of the score and parts, I was informed that this performance of *Job* would constitute its Los Angeles premiere. I was shocked. So great a work never being heard in that part of the country in the nearly fifty years of its existence...

About one month after this concert, I wrote a letter to Ursula Vaughan Williams in which I told her of my love for her late husband's music, my particular fondness for the Fourth and Sixth symphonies, and my resolve to bring as much of his music to American audiences as I could. Within a week, I had a lovely handwritten reply from her, a piece of correspondence I still treasure. Nestled amongst her thanks and good wishes, and her

delightful concluding remark “It is always a pleasure to know of a partisan”, was a leading question and comment: “Have you tried [Symphony] No. 9? One which, to my mind, follows 4 & 6 & moves into a new & further region.”

I did know the Ninth at this point, via its first recording with Sir Adrian Boult and the LPO. I found it a beautiful and troubling work, and knew that, given the right circumstances, I would perform it someday. I didn’t know then that it would end up (at least, as of this writing) as my favorite of the nine.

AN ONGOING PARTNERSHIP

In the 30 years that I have been a professional conductor, Vaughan Williams’ music has been a constant companion. I have conducted over twenty of his works, from the “popular” (*Fantasia on “Greensleeves”*, *The Wasps*, the *English Folksong Suite*) to the more challenging (*An Oxford Elegy*, *Partita for Double String Orchestra*, and four of the symphonies). His music has been there with me at some crucial junctures in my career: for my first subscription concert as Associate Conductor of the Seattle Symphony, I conducted what turned out to be that orchestra’s first performance of *A Pastoral Symphony*, and when I conducted concerts as a candidate for the music directorships of the Seattle Philharmonic and the Port Angeles Symphony, I programmed, respectively, *A London Symphony* and the *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1*. A personal goal is to conduct all nine of the symphonies; the Seattle Philharmonic is now playing one every other season. We performed the *London* in 2003, the Fifth in 2005 and the Ninth last January. I have already planned a performance of the Eighth for our 2008-09 season.

A word here about the Seattle Philharmonic. The oldest community orchestra in Seattle, it is made up of individuals who, while many of them play at a professional level, make their livelihoods in other areas but still crave the opportunity to perform symphonic literature. Their membership is strictly voluntary; they are there for the love of the music. This makes them the perfect orchestra with which to explore the works of Vaughan Williams. Unlike the anecdotal orchestra musician who cuts short the conductor’s subjective explication of a passage with the remark, “Look, buddy, just tell us whether you want it loud or soft!”, the musicians in the Philharmonic love to hear about the composer’s life, the work’s background, and the personal points of view that go into molding the performance; this makes their participation that much more vital. Rehearsals are simultaneously upbeat, informal and intense; during the intervals, the players and I can be found discussing the composer’s personal relationships, his or her country’s history at the time of a piece’s creation and other important factors that help us to arrive at a unified concept.



Because the Philharmonic has a history of playing standard repertoire alongside the rarely-heard, they have encouraged me to program in this fashion. (A welcome directive – the number of little-known compositions I desire to bring to the public is a large one!) In our nearly four years together, we have played such works as the *Eroica*, *Capriccio Italien* and *Rhapsody in Blue* in concert with works by Goffredo Petrassi, Aurelio de la Vega and Walter S. Hartley. When I was devising our 2006-07 season about two years ago, I decided to indulge a years-long dream and do my first all-Vaughan Williams concert. The program would consist of four works spanning roughly fifty years of his creative life, presented in chronological order:

The Wasps: Overture and Incidental Music
Magnificat
The Running Set
 Symphony No. 9

The program was duly embraced by the Philharmonic’s board and musicians, and scheduled for January 2007.

STUDY AND ANALYSIS:

EN ROUTE TO THE PERFORMANCE

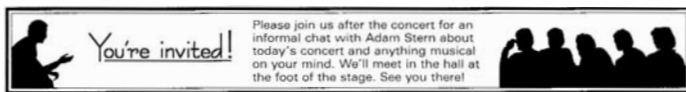
Vaughan Williams’ music comes very naturally to me as a musician. I envy and admire those singers, players and conductors who are able to execute just about anything by anybody (and, if they feel any unease, don’t show it). I have learned over the years that there is some music which, venerate and enjoy listening to it though I may, is “just not me” as a performer. But with the music that is closest to me – and, in the upper stratum, I would list Mozart, Haydn, Tchaikovsky and Vaughan Williams as my “holy quaternity” – there is always the sense that its message and meaning flow through me with no impediments, allowing me to do what a conductor should ideally do: to act as an impetus to the orchestra, enabling them to express what they feel and have learned about a given piece.

There is a great deal of difference between looking at a score for pleasure and studying it pursuant to a performance. Although casual, the former activity can certainly serve as good preparation for the latter, but the serious analysis of a piece of music is a lengthy and complicated process. (“Lengthy”, in fact, should read “never-ending”. Heaven forbid that any musician thinks he or she has ever discovered all there is to know about a great piece of music!) A combined sense of responsibility and exhilaration takes hold when you realize that a performance awaits at study’s end. You start to look for problems that may need to be solved (ensemble, balances), for important details of structure (form, recurrent themes and motifs, tempo relationships), and how to make the knowledge of all these aspects of a piece utterly second nature so that, come the performance, you can (as Mark Elder once advised me) “go for the sweep”. This advice is particularly apt in works as large – both in concept and in emotional content – as Vaughan Williams’ symphonies.

I certainly had heard some of the criticisms leveled against the Ninth over the years. There were those who felt that it was little more than a “rehash” of things Vaughan Williams had more effectively said before. There were also those who referred to it as “old man’s music,” a term which was meant pejoratively. I have come to dismiss these complaints as invalid. Certainly the Vaughan Williams “sound” is there, but there is an absolutely

fresh statement being made in this work. And yes, it is the music of an old man – and what an old man, capable of communicating a long life's worth of experience with such strength and passion in his mid-eighties.

One of the things that always struck me about the Ninth is the vast amount of conflicting emotions present in its pages. While some of the symphonies have a predominant emotional tenor throughout (I have sometimes described the Fourth to students as “a clenched fist set to music”) the Ninth has moments of anger, tranquility, whimsy, loss, fear, wistfulness – and somehow the composer manages to juggle them all successfully and weld a cohesive whole. If this symphony invites comparison to any of its brethren, it would be to the Sixth, and not just because of their shared key of E minor. More than in the others, the Sixth and Ninth Symphonies present a wealth of ideas in their first three movements that reappear, transformed, in their finales. The transformations in the Epilogue of the Sixth are automatically imposed by its *pianissimo sempre* marking; any returning material is doomed to be a mere ghost of its former self. In the Ninth, the transformations have mostly to do with the smoothing over of previously stated ideas, as if Vaughan Williams is trying to come to terms with disturbing thoughts and memories by changing the notes and rhythms that describe them. Whether the composer succeeds in leaving us with a feeling of resolution must be determined by each individual listener.

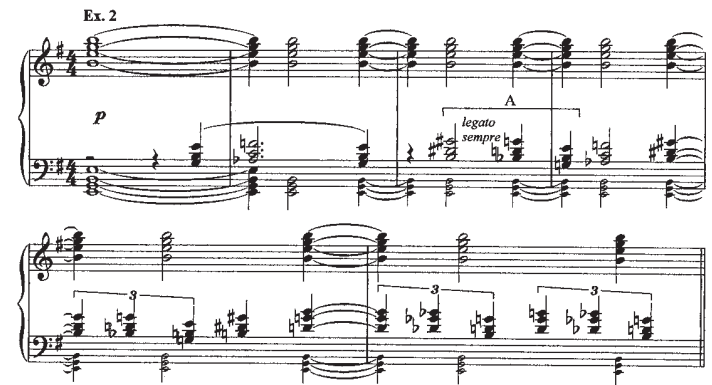


The Ninth was a relatively easy work to rehearse in that, with the exceptions of a very few passages, it is not particularly difficult to play. (I may hear about this statement from my three saxophonists, whose thorny bits in the Scherzo were being practiced right up until they went onstage for the performance. Bless them – in American vernacular, they “nailed it.”) This meant that we could start peeling back its emotional layers from the very beginning, and dig more deeply at every rehearsal. While the Philharmonic enjoyed playing everything on the program, I believe that their strongest connection was with this symphony. There was something that took hold of us from that first rehearsal, something of which we still speak now, with the performance more than three months in the past.

The Ninth begins with two important sets of material, with conflict arising from the use of bare octaves in the first set against that of chords in the second. The very opening presents a long, quiet, subtly undulating E, spread out over five octaves throughout the orchestra, which provides the background for the first theme, presented in octaves and in layers:



This leads directly to the first solo entrance of the three saxophones who keen away in triads over a dense but soft E-minor chord:



Four times in this passage does Vaughan Williams make use of one of his frequent musical thumb-prints, a descending three-note gesture that cannot secure footing in major or minor (see example 2, “A”, for its first appearance). (Vaughan Williams invariably uses this gesture in dramatic ways, for example the impassioned string interruptions toward the end of the Fifth’s *Romanza*, the very opening of the Sixth [which has its seeds in the just-cited example from the Fifth] and the other-worldly wailing of the solo soprano in the *Sinfonia Antartica*.) The opening materials return, *forte* and with seeming anger, and reestablish the use of layered octaves. The first time that chords and octaves appear together is at the fourth measure of rehearsal figure 3, a passage of heartbreaking intensity:



The last components of importance in this movement’s structure are the passage beginning at figure 4, with solo clarinet over chords in the harp (which passage also makes copious use of the “A” gesture), and the response to this, a gentle descent by the first violins and flute



supported by the other winds and strings. This last bit, so sweet in this first appearance, comes back later in the movement with a ferocious vengeance (fifth measure of figure 17), and makes us aware that it was a variant of the “A” gesture all along:



This movement, like the entire work, abounds in struggle. Not surprising, then, to discover a marked reference at figure 10 to the opening of *Landscape* from *Sinfonia Antartica* – a great depiction of man confronting nature – and, a few bars later (two measures before figure 11) a reference to a recurrent cross-rhythmic idea from the first movement of the Sixth – an equally great depiction of man confronting himself.

It was not my intention to get overly-analytical with this essay, but I did want to give some idea of the kinds of things that leap out at a musician in pursuit of an intimate relationship with a piece of music. Preceding are but a few of the secrets that the first movement revealed to me over the course of my getting intensely acquainted with it, and which shaped my overall concept of how to handle its direction. It put me on the constant lookout for the ways in which Vaughan Williams would put forth his materials: in single strands, block octaves, chords against chords or combinations of some or all of these methods. I made similar discoveries about the remaining movements; I was particularly struck, as mentioned before, by the ways in which the Finale – not christened “Epilogue” by its creator, but certainly qualifying as one – synthesized much of the previously-stated materials in ways that seemed to seek “closure”. The very beginning of the Finale is a quiet rumination on the symphony’s opening, set in a swaying 6/8 motion for the first violins:



Later, at figure 16, the bittersweet descent from the first movement that had changed into something of horror (cf. exx. 4 and 5) has become the source of a beautiful melody spun out by the violas:



taken up in charming fashion shortly thereafter by a trio of woodwinds:



and finally heard as a magisterial *Largamente* for full orchestra, in block octaves with eventual octave accompaniment:



This passage is deceptive, in that it is climactic and could well have led directly to a conclusion; with his magician’s way with modulation, Vaughan Williams could perhaps have fashioned a comfortable and fitting close here – a peaceful conclusion, in spite of troubling elements, as he did with *A London Symphony* or the Fifth. But if, as some commentators have observed, Vaughan Williams had any presentiments about his imminent death, he is not about to “go gentle into that good night”. The symphony ends with an expression of granitic power. Twice he recalls the chords which fairly screamed in outrage in the second movement of the Sixth:



Here in the Ninth they are interlaced with massive octave statements of the first movement’s main theme:



The final argument is between the saxophones and the rest of the orchestra. At the end of the first movement, Vaughan Williams had returned to the chordal “duel” similar to that in Example 2; the saxes stained the E minor texture with chords in F minor, quietly faded away, and left in their wake a whispered E minor chord in the strings. But here in the Finale, Vaughan Williams does not react to the same offense with passivity. The orchestra explodes in a huge E major chord, and recedes. The saxes enter with an E major triad but defect to F major; the orchestra rears up, crushes the sax ensemble with another burst of E major chord, and backs off again. Once more the saxes attempt to corrupt the orchestra’s pure E major chord, but the orchestra, which can virtually be felt girding its loins, builds to the most powerful E major chord of all, punctuated by a blow on the tam-tam. Over three and a half bars in moderate tempo, this chord makes a long, slow fade-out; instrumental choirs gradually leave off one by one, until only the steadfast strings are left to dissolve to *niente* (nothing). I cannot begin to express the power of these last moments; to write about them, and not come even remotely close to expressing what Vaughan Williams has accomplished in sound, is to realize the power that music has over words.

EPILOGUE

For any conductors lucky enough to perform this wonderful symphony, I do have a couple of bits of advice, the first based on a revelation at the initial rehearsal. After the Philharmonic and I had been working at the first movement, I started to get the impression that the music was fragmented somehow; it seemed not to be flowing in the way that Vaughan Williams’ music invariably does. I was finally able to put a finger on it. There are several key measures in this movement (and in the Finale as well) which begin with a crotchet rest (cf. rehearsal figures 2, 4, 8, the fifth measure of 17, etc.); the measures immediately preceding these have crotchets or crotchet triplets right up to the end of the measure. The orchestra was doing an absolutely natural thing and clipping these final notes a bit shy of their full length, thus subtly increasing the spaces that Vaughan Williams had in mind. When the players were asked to always play these final notes at full value, the sense of fragmentation utterly disappeared. It also made the one instance in which Vaughan Williams obviously did want this sort of clipped effect (Figure 11) that much more powerful.

I would also suggest playing the chaotic triplet passage (first

movement, beginning at the fourth beat of figure 14) slowly once or twice, so that the orchestra can hear the amazing harmonies imbedded therein. Doing so greatly increased the level of intensity that the Philharmonic brought to this section.

Two vivid memories of having prepared and performed the Ninth – the first and last ones. I will never forget the effect of hearing the first note of this piece in person (I had never heard a live performance prior to rehearsing it). No recording, no matter how expert the engineering, could compare with being in the room with the orchestra sounding that unison E, supported by a roll on the bass drum. The effect is unbelievable.

When our performance was over, there was a very long pause between the final cessation of sound and the beginning of the audience's very kind ovation. As I came offstage following a last curtain call, I felt myself starting to give way to something very deep and uplifting and sad all at once. I realized that the Ninth had gotten to me in ways that even Vaughan Williams' other works

hadn't; I had given myself completely over to its prevailing mood and was utterly spent. All those years of knowing it; all those months of studying it; all those hours of rehearsing it; and now it was over. I made my way back to my dressing room, where my 10 year-old son Oscar was waiting for me; I sat down and burst into tears as he held me, not quite understanding why his father was crying but comforting me nonetheless. Vaughan Williams' musical achievements would be great whether I performed them or not, and yet I felt that the Ninth, long misunderstood and relatively unknown, had "needed" me somehow. It was an honor and a privilege to be in its service.

Did I mention, by the way, that when I discussed the hiring of materials for the Ninth with Oxford University Press, I was informed that this performance would constitute its Northwest premiere in the U.S.? It was another *Job* moment. *So great a work never being heard in this part of the country in the nearly 50 years of its existence...*

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS' DISCARDED PROGRAMME IN HIS NINTH SYMPHONY

by John Barr



Thomas Hardy

I first heard Vaughan Williams' Ninth Symphony in 1962 over a New York radio station. I heard it with considerable interest, but was not compelled to hear it again soon. Around 1979 or 1980 my interest in Vaughan Williams and his music intensified considerably, causing me to buy recordings of it whenever they could be obtained. Before long I got a recording of his Ninth Symphony and began to hear and read about it rather frequently. I found it harder to understand and more difficult to retain its themes than any of the preceding eight symphonies. In retrospect, its many musical ideas seemed to me rather fragmentary and lacking in the organic progression which I felt to be present in the Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Eighth Symphonies. Indeed Michael Kennedy states that in the composer's note there are no less than twenty-four musical examples, "but even this does not do full justice to the thematic profusion and complexity of the symphony, especially its great finale." (Kennedy, *The Works...* footnote, p. 396).

My reading about the Ninth Symphony began in Kennedy's indispensable musical biography of the composer, and in his meticulous catalogue documenting Vaughan Williams' numerous works. In the catalogue the chief purpose of the composer's note was to describe the unusual instruments in his orchestration and discuss the formal design in each of the four movements. Of the second movement, *Andante sostenuto*, Vaughan Williams wrote that it:

... seems to have no logical connection between its various themes. This has led some people to think it must have a programme since programme music need not be logical. It is quite true that this movement started off with a programme, but now, oh no, we never mention it – and the music must be left to speak for itself – whatever that may mean. (Kennedy, A Catalogue... p. 233).

Kennedy claims that the Ninth Symphony had its origin in an idea about Salisbury, “a city [Vaughan Williams] loved and whose literary association with *Tess* exerted a strong fascination on him, [but] was soon abandoned...” (Kennedy, *The Works...* p. 369). Alain Frogley in his definitive study (2001) of the Ninth Symphony summarized that Kennedy also disclosed that Stonehenge, Salisbury Cathedral, and “the ghostly drummer of Salisbury Plain” were part of the programme. (Frogley, p. 256) He elaborates that the basis for this Salisbury programme comes from both oral and written sources. The only people to whom the composer mentioned it were his wife, Ursula, and Michael Kennedy, therefore memories of what he said about the programme are essentially what Kennedy has written. The written sources for the programme Frogley found in the composer’s compositional sketches. Frogley in his aforementioned book has listed in his Table 7.1 a complete documentation of these references as to the specific manuscripts and the locations wherein they appear. These references include:

“Wessex Prelude” above draft for I [first movement]
 “Stonehenge” above sketch related to Theme 1 of II
 “Tess” above draft based on theme related to Theme 4 of II
 “Wessex Scherzo” above draft for opening of III
 “Landscape” above draft for II and later above IV
 “Steeple Tune” above sketch related to Theme 4b of IV
 “Introibo” above draft based initially on Theme 5 of IV, with words ‘Introibo ad altere Dei’ underlaid (Frogley, pp. 258-259).

Anyone interested in the subject of this discarded programme should read Frogley’s book, especially Chapter 7.

My initial reaction to the Ninth Symphony’s themes as “lacking in organic progressions” was soon tempered by my reading of Frogley’s masterful study of Vaughan Williams’ careful compositional process and resulting final form. I think my first reactions, however, are still justified given the “profusion and complexity” (Kennedy, cited earlier) of the themes. During the 1980s and 1990s, with my study score at hand, I would mark both formal and programmatic references at the various places. This helpfully informed my listening, but as Frogley was to write later, “the reader is left wanting to know more.” (Frogley, p. 256).



Hardy's Melchester

In the first half of 2002 (primarily the summer) I carefully read the first six chapters of Frogley’s book and then proceeded to Chapter 7, “Salisbury, Hardy, and Bunyan: The Programmatic Origins of the Symphony”. I must admit that during the reading

of this chapter the music of the Ninth Symphony virtually sprang to life! Though Frogley painstakingly traced this music in its evolutionary stages to show its final structural logic, it wasn’t until I read his extended exposition of the literary connections that the essence and inevitability of the music was clearly revealed. Frogley also observed that the composer’s programmatic references persisted beyond the “early sketches” all the way into the “final autograph full score and late piano arrangement”. (Frogley, p. 260) His other general observation is that “in most cases where inscriptions have been changed or deleted in these manuscripts, there has been no, or only insignificant, changes to the musical idea involved.” (Frogley, pp. 260-261) Frogley, therefore, makes clear that in spite of the programmatic deletions, their influence and even representation remains in the music.

An illustration of Frogley’s revelatory study concerns the Ninth Symphony’s second movement from rehearsal number 14 to 19. This involves a series of eight strikes on a “very large gong” “deep bells” occurring with theme 1 (Stonehenge), theme 4 (Tess), theme 2 (the ghostly drummer) and theme 3. Frogley tells of Tess’s execution, in the brief and final chapter of Hardy’s novel, at the prison in Wintoncester at the traditional hour of eight a.m. After Frogley sets the scene with a quote from the conclusion of the novel, he writes:

The eight strokes of the Wintoncester clocks are surely the eight bell strokes of Vaughan Williams’s music, and it is significant that themes 1 and 4, associated with Stonehenge and Tess respectively are combined over the tolling bells (the bells are used nowhere else in the symphony). (Frogley, p. 268).

Regarding the same portion of the Ninth Symphony, having discarded his programme, Vaughan Williams is left to describing his musical examples which he has numbered from 1 to 24. He writes:

Then a menacing stroke on the gong brings back a reminiscence of 5. Why is a gong in the orchestra always supposed to be menacing? To the unmusical hearer a note on the gong means dinner; this perhaps is menacing enough, as a well known parody of a hymn reminds us. Anyhow, the gong stroke gives a sinister aspect to this theme. (Kennedy, *A Catalogue...* p. 234).

It seems obvious that the ultimate nature of this music can only be truly explained with the use of the literary programme Frogley has revealed.

When one reads Frogley’s chapter concerning the programme to which Vaughan Williams previously alluded, it becomes difficult to consider the Ninth Symphony without any acknowledgement of it. This is not to say that the music cannot be discussed and analyzed on a purely musical basis. Indeed it has been. But if one reads Elliot Schwartz’s analysis in his book, *The Symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (1964), the complete lack of programmatic reference (though this information was not likely available at the time of his writing) certainly limits the discussion to a relatively superficial level. Hugh Ottaway in *Vaughan Williams Symphonies* (1972) makes use of the limited information about the discarded program and writes:

But even if nothing were known of these Wessex associations, the Ninth would still strike many listeners as Vaughan Williams in his most Hardy-like frame of mind. This is not a matter of scene-

painting, which is negligible here, or anything else picturesque; it concerns the composer's human responses, his perception of reality, and manifests itself in the very substance of his musical invention. (Ottaway, pp. 59-60).

Here Ottaway's comments get behind the surface of the music and speak to its deeper or possibly deepest level, although his reference to scene-painting as "negligible" seems now to be an overstatement in view of Frogley's later observation of the Wintoncester clock depiction. Lionel Pike's penetrating analysis (2003) of Vaughan Williams' Ninth along with Frogley's justifies an approach to the symphony as absolute music, but in addition he integrates the various programmatic references into his study where appropriate and duly acknowledges Frogley's work. This is exemplified in Pike's discussion of the second movement: "According to Alain Frogley, the piece is based on Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. It is quite difficult, once one has read Frogley's article, to rid one's mind of the association. (Pike, p. 311) He maintains, regarding Vaughan Williams' statement presented in my first quote, "...many might feel it advisable to ignore this Tess background...But one point is inescapable: programme music it may be – but in no way is it illogical." (Pike, p. 320).

Vaughan Williams' attitude to programme music was apparently ambivalent, but his own statements would seem to favour, though not exclusively, the emphasis on absolute or pure music. Earlier in his career he wrote:

The title A London Symphony may suggest to some hearers a descriptive piece, but that is not the intention of the composer. A better title would perhaps be "Symphony by a Londoner," that is to say the life of London (including, possibly its various sights and sounds) has suggested to the composer an attempt at musical expression; but it would be no help to the listener to describe these in words. The music is intended to be self-expressive, and must stand or fall as "absolute" music. (Kennedy, *A Catalogue...*, p. 71).

Vaughan Williams wrote these words in 1920. Since he gave his second symphony an extra-musical title, he naturally felt the need to articulate how he viewed this work between the polarities of absolute and programme music. Thirty-six years later, regarding the Sixth Symphony's finale, Vaughan Williams, due to various descriptive interpretations of it, wrote to Michael Kennedy this ambivalent statement:

With regard to the last movement of my No. 6, I do NOT BELIEVE IN meanings and mottos, as you know, but I think we can get in words nearest to the substance of my last movement in "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded by a sleep." (Kennedy, *The Works...* p. 302).

It seems clear to me from these quotes of Vaughan Williams' writing that he was first and foremost concerned that his instrumental music communicated to listeners as pure music. Yet he was willing to share any extra-musical ideas, verbal or visual, that he himself could associate with his music and thus keep his intent clear.

Having said this, why did Vaughan Williams discard the Salisbury programme in his Ninth Symphony when its atmosphere, themes, and gestures so beautifully portray it? Not only did he exert a

tremendous amount of work in its composition, but he spent, at his own expense, 250 pounds for an extra three-hour rehearsal which was its only preparation before the rehearsal on the day of its first performance. (Kennedy, *The Works...*, p. 342) While there were favourable reviews and warm responses to his last symphony, Kennedy said, "Its enigmatic mood puzzled them and more attention was therefore paid to the use of the fluegel horn and the flippant program note." (Ibid. pp. 342-343) Surely Vaughan Williams' programme note with its sarcastic humor and tone, exemplified in the two earlier quotes, was of no help to the listener in gaining an enlightened sense of the music. It seems to me that a carefully crafted essay on the Salisbury connections would have stimulated a positive listening climate leading to a better understanding and acceptance of a work whose true significance was lost in its presentation as absolute music resulting in the generally cool reception. I think the answer as to why Vaughan Williams discarded the Salisbury programme might be that he felt programme music was increasingly out of fashion by the mid 1950s. He also was observing his own music, in some cases, going out of fashion. Donald Mitchell's negative critique of *Hodie* was particularly harsh. (see Kennedy, *The Works...*, pp. 330-331) Maybe for this reason Vaughan Williams felt that he was protecting himself against such negativism by discarding the programme which might have been thought of as old fashioned. Yet in response to a friend who called him the next morning after this first performance as to, "what he thought of the notices. 'I don't think they can quite forgive me for still being able to do it at my age,' was his reply." (Kennedy, *The Works...*, p. 343) We cannot know if these words expressed his feelings in depth or on the surface. It should be said, however that Vaughan Williams, even in his old age, had probably not lost his confidence and more importantly, Ursula Vaughan Williams said, "It was what he meant..." (Frogley, p. 20) Soon after this quote, Frogley states:

If critical responses to the symphony had any significant impact on Vaughan Williams, he did not let it show. His own reactions to the first performance resulted in some minor alterations which he discussed with Douglas on 8 April...The composer heard the symphony again, this time...at the Promenade concert of 5 August, and was pleased, feeling that "it was the beginning of something new in his work". (Ibid. p. 21).

For whatever reason Vaughan Williams discarded his programmatic references, it seems to have been, in my view, an unfortunate decision, but fortunately the Ninth Symphony has survived to be further investigated. I think it is accurate to say that many listeners have been both puzzled by, and loyal to it. For this reason we are indebted to Alain Frogley's exhaustive study of this work and his restoration of all the programmatic considerations. From them, it appears to me, we see that the discarded programme is an essential ingredient to the content of this great music. May listeners continue to be further enlightened!

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE NINTH

by Rob Furneaux

Huge Atlantic swells meeting their doom on the jagged rocks of Cornwall's forbidding coastline – that's what the closing of the Ninth Symphony suggested to me the first time I heard it. And what a great symphony it is!

It seems to me difficult to pin down exactly why the Ninth is a great symphony, but I suppose an enigma lies at the heart of many great works and the Ninth is no exception. The symphony has a number of intriguing elements which seem to build its enigmatic status: the trio of saxophones, for example; the flugel horn; the connection with Wessex and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Perhaps it is a combination of all of these elements, plus, of course, the fact that this is the old man's last profound utterance which adds to its mysterious nature. Personally I must say that I regret the dropping (or should I say the loss on the way) of the title "Wessex Symphony". This would have rooted it firmly in my part of the world and – if nothing else – would have no doubt prompted regular performances by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on their tours of the West Country.

I suppose I was lucky in that, like some of the society's more mature members who were there when it first appeared, I came to the symphony last. In my case it was simply because the symphony was rather hard to get hold of on record in the 1980s. It could not be picked up off the shelf and I had to order it specially. Frankly, I was expecting to be mildly disappointed. Articles I had read about Vaughan Williams suggested that the Ninth was not in the league of other ninths, and in fact marked a tailing off of the great man's powers. Perhaps this all added to my astonishment when I actually played it. Even now I well remember the occasion: it was an August morning, and I'd just returned from an early morning walk along the banks of the Tamar with my dog. Settling down in my garden studio, the music flowed forth. I was stunned.

Although an atmosphere of tragedy pervades the piece, somehow it also seems uplifting. Somewhere deep within its core is a determination, a dogged refusal not to yield. The words of the *Oxford Elegy* come to mind: "despair I will not"; indeed, for me, there are parallels between the two pieces, not least in an atmosphere of resignation to fate, tempered by an inner strength.

But the Ninth offers more: there are elements of otherworldliness, none more so than the closing bars of the first movement where the plaintive moan of the saxophones seems almost pleading in tone as the movement ebbs away. (The Slatkin version brings this element out the most effectively.)

In contrast – and another element of the Ninth's appeal – is the "Solent" tune and a connection with Vaughan Williams' younger days. This adds a wonderfully wistful intonation to the symphony's middle section affording temporary relief to the more earnest mood of the outer movements.

And then there's the last movement – ah, the last movement, surely one of Vaughan Williams' greatest creations and still so rarely played in the concert hall! The closing bars are truly unique; no other symphony has a close anything like it. As I said at the opening of this piece it reminded me of huge swells crashing up on a forbidding coast. I tend generally not to make mental pictures of music as I listen, but this piece is an exception. (Perhaps this would make a good subject for the society members to submit their views: what individual Vaughan Williams tunes remind them of? I expect there would be some unusual replies...the end of the Fourth Symphony reminds me of an argument I had with the wife in 1978.)

I digress. To sum up, in my eyes – or should I say ears – the Ninth remains one of Vaughan Williams' greatest utterances. There is no element of the symphony I dislike – right down to the tiny celesta so deliciously brought out in the Adrian Boult recording. Perhaps my only regret is that Vaughan Williams did not use more harps in the closing bars, as their contribution is a little too quiet in concert performance. (After all, Bantock and Alfvén used 6!) But perhaps that would have smacked of over-indulgence and concert performances, already rare, would be almost non-existent.

Overall, I would place the marvellous Ninth very highly on the list of my Vaughan Williams Top Ten – but we don't want to bring THAT subject up again do we...

SYMPHONY NO. 9 – A COMPARATIVE CD REVIEW

by Robin Barber

"This new 9th Symphony was the evening's thriller. In a sense it is a skyscraper among symphonies, a creation of mass and majesty...(a) vast and striking score." (Houston Examiner)

"The performance seemed a perfect one in every way and the exquisite beauty and cosmic quality of this immortal work struck me as being ideally realized." (Percy Grainger)

The editor asked me to review current recordings of this symphony for this edition of the Journal, focusing on the work. This is an update of my survey published in the Journal No. 25 of five years ago. The only new CD to come my way in this time is the live Stokowski version on the Cala label. I have therefore taken the opportunity to revisit all the other versions available in order to give members an informed decision as to which one to go for. There is inevitably some repetition, but I hope this update will spur exploration of a great work of art. The quotes that preface this article are deliberately from America whereas in the first review, I used three British commentators, Michael Kennedy, James Day and Hugh Ottaway (see below).

Composed 50 years ago, there are now ten recordings on CD of the symphony currently available. These versions are listed here in chronological order of recording:

1958: Everest EVC 9001 London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult
 1958: Cala CACD0539 Leopold Stokowski and his Symphony Orchestra (released 2004)
 1969: EMI Classics CDM 7 64021 2 London Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Adrian Boult
 1971: RCA Victor Gold Seal GD 90508 London Symphony Orchestra/ André Previn
 1990: Chandos CHAN 8941 London Symphony Orchestra/ Bryden Thomson
 1991: RCA Victor Red Seal 09026 61196 2 Philharmonia Orchestra/ Leonard Slatkin
 1994: EMI Eminence 7243 5 65455 2 6 Royal Liverpool PO / Vernon Handley
 1995: Teldec 450998463-2 BBC Symphony Orchestra/ Sir Andrew Davis
 1996: Naxos 8.550738 Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/ Kees Bakels
 2000: EMI Classics 7243 5 570862 5 London Philharmonic Orchestra / Bernard Haitink.

In addition to these recordings, I have made comparison with a BBC recording of the premiere of the symphony with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Malcolm Sargent. It is likely that recordings of this symphony will be enhanced in the near future as a result of continuing recordings of all of the symphonies by Richard Hickox and the London Symphony Orchestra (Chandos) and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Robert Spano on Telarc. The key, I believe to comparing performances of this elusive work lies in the timings of not only the entire symphony but the individual movements. This symphony needs,

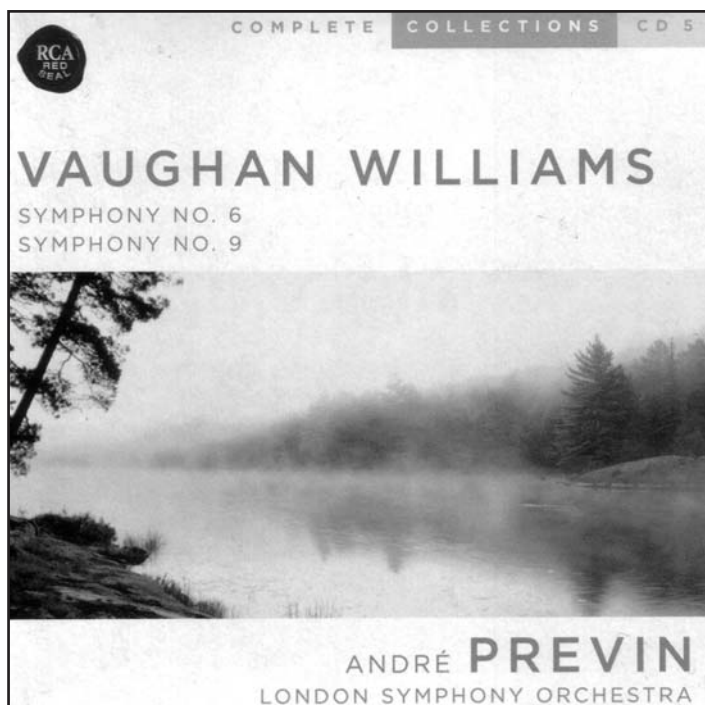
in order to be fully appreciated, time and space to breathe its meaning, particularly in the outer movements, so I make no apology for starting my review with an updated table of the timings. That there is a variation of over eight minutes between recordings is remarkable, but there is no doubt in my mind that the longer the better.

	Conductor	Date	1st Mvt	2nd Mvt	3rd Mvt	4th Mvt	Time
	Sargent *	1958	7:50	7:15	5:34	9:46	30:25
1	Boult	1958	9:17	8:03	5:33	11:41	34:34
2	Stokowski	1958	10:12	8:09	5:12	12:25	35:58
3	Boult	1969	9:13	7:46	5:40	12:05	34:44
4	Previn	1971	10:06	8:37	5:58	13:49	38:30
5	Thomson	1990	7:16	7:04	5:44	10:48	30:52
6	Slatkin	1991	9:19	7:51	4:51	10:33	32:34
7	Handley	1994	8:47	7:27	5:26	11:13	32:53
8	Davis	1995	8:47	8:39	5:18	11:18	34:02
9	Bakels	1996	7:39	7:07	5:15	9:44	29:45
10	Haitink	2000	10:06	7:56	5:31	12:56	36:29

* BBC live recording of the first performance 2nd April 1958, Royal Festival Hall, London.

Sir Adrian Boult's first recording of the Ninth was with Everest and was the conclusion of a complete cycle with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The previous symphonies were all on the Decca label, so why the American label was chosen remains unclear. The composer was due to attend the recording on the August 26 1958 and according to Ursula "...was looking forward to Adrian's recording...when they would work over it section by section: this almost anatomical dissection was something from which he always learnt a great deal." He died that same morning, and Boult's short and poignant speech before starting work is reproduced as the first track on the CD. The performance of the symphony is a strong and committed one and given its now nearly fifty year age, the recording is surprisingly good, though lacking the clarity and dynamic range of later digital ones. The tempi are much slower than Sargent's in all but the third movement, which may have worried Boult at the time, for according to Roy Douglas (in his book *Working with Vaughan Williams*) "...he told me with some anxiety that he found his performances of the Ninth Symphony took four or five minutes longer than Sargent's." I have no doubt that Boult's tempi are absolutely spot on and this disc for reasons of both the strength of the reading and its historical importance should be in the collection of all serious admirers of the composer. It is coupled with a superb account of Malcolm Arnold's Symphony No. 3 with the composer conducting.

In late 1969 **Boult** made a second recording, also with the LPO, this time for EMI and he adopted very similar tempi throughout. I have affection for it, because the original LP version introduced me to the work in the early seventies and through repeated listening I grew to admire the symphony deeply. Listening to the CD re-issue it is clear that the conductor had no new insights and it is a less moving performance than the Everest. The recording and playing are good and at medium price it is a safe bet.



André Previn's 1971 recording with the London Symphony Orchestra is superb, quite unlike any of the others available and in a class of its own. It is available on a single CD coupled with the Sixth, or as part of a very cheap boxed set of the complete symphonies released on BMG Classics in 2003. It is the disc from this set that I have used for this review. Tempi throughout are slower than almost any other conductor with the result that the symphony is a full eight minutes longer than under Sargent's baton. As a result the score comes across as a darker, more contemplative work, to quote Richard Adams (in an online survey of recordings of the Ninth on musicweb-international.com) "there is a wonderfully foreboding atmosphere to much of this performance." When required it is also very expansive and the quintessential Vaughan Williams string writing is most beautifully evoked. This is "Oceanic RVW" par excellence. Previn could be criticised for being too slow at times, wallowing in the music's beautiful spiritual moments and climaxes. Does the gorgeously smooth playing lead to a less rugged and questing performance than the composer intended? I think not: for me this is the right approach to this deeply philosophical, even religious music, particularly in the fourth movement. As Alain Frogley informs us in his scholarly book on the Ninth, the original sketches for the last movement were annotated with a quotation from Psalm 43, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, or simply in places, *Introibo (Then, I will go unto the altar of God)*. The ending in this recording is perfect, following those three great waves of sound the symphony fades out perfectly, to nothing – *niente* – as the composer indicated. We had to wait nearly twenty years for the next recording, this time as part of a Chandos cycle.

Bryden Thomson's reading, is I'm afraid, a very rushed affair. It has a harsh, even brutal quality quite the antithesis of Previn, who used the same orchestra. There is no sense of mystery or contemplation. Take, for example, his tempi in the opening movement which are incredibly quick, resulting in music that just does not breathe or expand. A pity since the LSO once again plays brilliantly and there is excellent sound, the flügel horn is very clear and the saxophones wonderfully "demented" in the third movement. The last movement comes across well until the crucial

ending, which though powerful is too abrupt: no cosmic fadeout here I'm afraid.

Leonard Slatkin, one of a number of distinguished American conductors who have shown great empathy for Vaughan Williams' music, recorded a widely acclaimed cycle with the Philharmonia Orchestra. Many would argue that overall, in terms of recording quality, orchestral playing and interpretation it is the finest currently available. The Ninth receives a good but not outstanding performance, the music played straight, with tempi on the brisk side throughout. I am not convinced he has penetrated the depths of this enigmatic music; the hairs on this listener's neck certainly remain unruffled as the final chord dies away. An interesting point is that David Mason, who played the flügel horn in the premiere, also appears in this one.

Vernon Handley's account was originally issued on the EMI Eminence label in 1994 as part of his cycle with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and I reviewed it in the very first edition of this Journal. It has now recently been reissued on the CFP label, with, I think, better sound quality. I have little to add to my previous remarks: this is a deeply committed and powerful performance; the visionary ending is realized to great effect with the harp *glissandi* nicely to the fore. At budget price and coupled with the Sixth, this disc is a very safe bet.

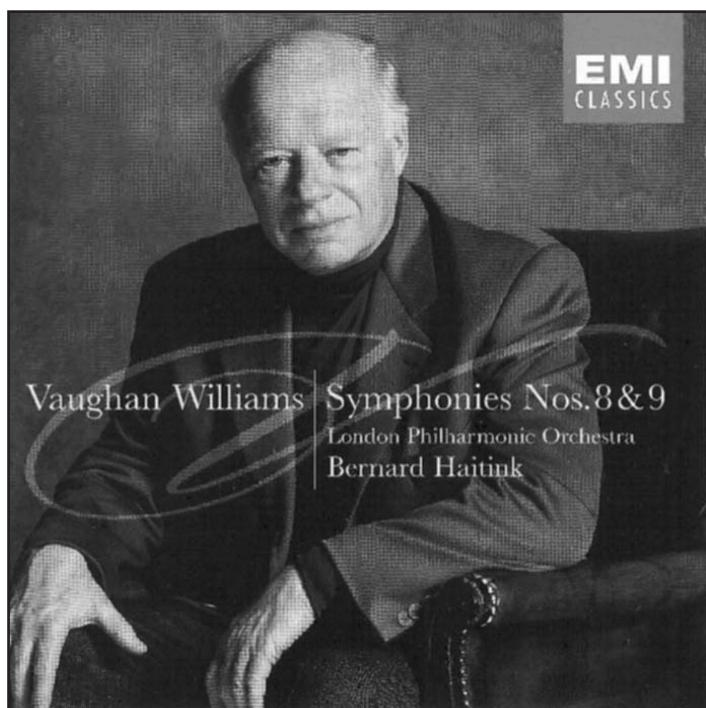
Sir Andrew Davis' cycle of the symphonies with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on Teldec has had a mixed reception and his interpretations vary in insight, with a terrific Sixth and a very disappointing *Pastoral*. But the Ninth is given a good performance with committed playing though the sound is a bit recessed and it pays to have the volume up. The flügel horn is most beautifully played throughout giving an air of remoteness and mystery.

Davis is particularly successful in the two inner movements. By adopting slow tempi (slower even than Previn) in the *andante sostenuto* we can enjoy the passages of sublime string and solo violin writing in sharp contrast to the brutal march theme. Conversely, the scherzo is taken briskly, the clear acoustic allowing the saxophones and xylophone to the fore before the movement dissolves away with the drum taps. The finale is very well played but ultimately lacks that elusive visionary quality, though the ending is very moving.

Keith Mitchell highly recommended **Kees Bakels'** Naxos recording with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in a review published in Journal 14, a view that is also supported by Richard Adams. However, I can't find the same enthusiasm for this performance, for despite its clarity and undoubted sincerity it is spoiled by fast tempi, quicker even than Sargent or Thompson and crucially he takes the last movement some 3-4 minutes quicker than Previn or Haitink. For me the ending is a washout rather than a glimpse of the cosmos.

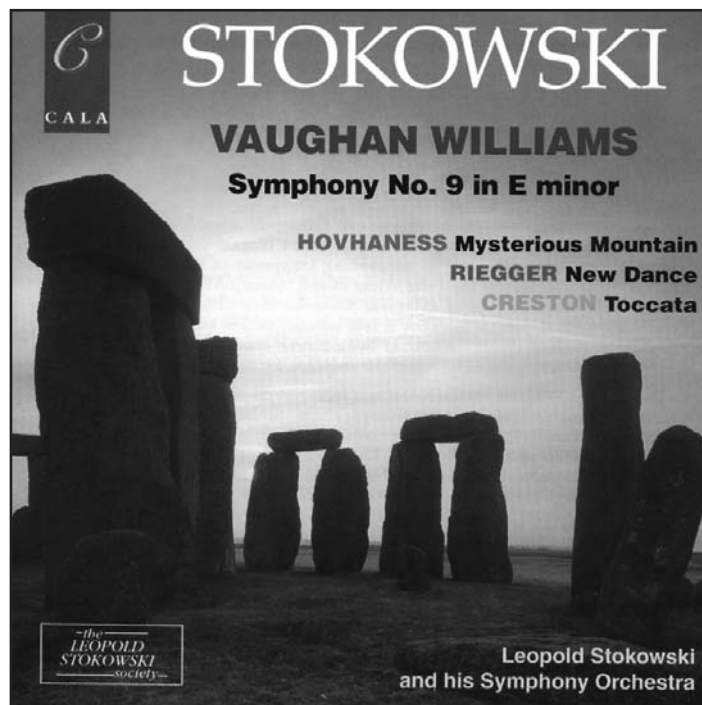
I reviewed **Bernard Haitink's** interpretation of the symphony on EMI in Journal 21. Subsequent listening has, if anything, deepened my admiration for this superbly recorded and played version. He brings to the interpretation a numinous quality confirming the opinion of the noted and, in this repertoire, surprisingly empathetic music critic, Neville Cardus. In a notice for the Manchester Guardian of Sargent's second performance of

the symphony at the 1958 Proms, he wrote: "*Vaughan Williams in his latest period puts me in mind of Bruckner...Both are noble without a single self-conscious attitude. And both are occasionally clumsy and hardly 'professional'...Vaughan Williams's great achievement has been to dispense with the current musical coin of the period of his basic culture and maturity and to modulate to the contemporary tone and language without obvious iconoclasm. He is of our period, and yet he is full of harvest – which means to say he is a master.*" Haitink's sympathetic advocacy surely now puts this symphony securely into the twentieth century repertoire.



So finally, to **Leopold Stokowski**, a live recording made with a scratch New York orchestra at Carnegie Hall, 25 September 1958 but only released on CD in 2004. It is clear that the conductor had gathered some of the best orchestral musicians of the time, and the three saxophone players sound as if they were from a jazz background. The interpretation, playing and recording are a revelation. His original intention was to give the first US performance with the Houston Symphony Orchestra in November that year and indeed these performances went ahead on November 10 and 11. However, learning of Vaughan Williams' sudden death he decided to change a planned New York programme and give the Ninth instead of the Shostakovich eleventh symphony. My colleague David Betts has already contributed a very good review of this CD in the Journal 32. Timings are important, and David was quick to spot that the Cala CD notes are inaccurate in giving the total performance at 38:58, whereas the performance is actually 3 minutes shorter. Though seemingly pedantic this is an important point for making comparison with the two other more expansive views presented by Haitink and Previn. Stokowski's strength is the raw power and immediacy of this extraordinary reading. Cala are to be congratulated for their enterprise in releasing this unique performance, and given its age the recording is remarkably good. The sound, though forward, is very acceptable and though not intrusive, one can feel the presence of that expectant New York audience. Only a few coughs intrude. (I trust Percy Grainger was not responsible!) "A skyscraper among symphonies"? Well perhaps, we now know that the spire of Salisbury Cathedral and Stonehenge may have been in the composer's mind when composing the symphony and they both reach, in differing ways,

into the sky. Although these English monuments are far removed from the concrete edifices of New York (a city Vaughan Williams greatly admired) this remains an extraordinarily perceptive observation from 1958 by the anonymous critic of the *Houston Examiner*. If after listening to this CD you are not convinced that the Ninth Symphony is a masterpiece then you probably never will be.



I will conclude this updated review with a slightly different recommendation than previously.

Reluctantly, I have relegated the Boult on Everest as a historical recording from 1958 in favour of the Stokowski on Cala. For modern recordings, again I would return to two, non-British conductors who both give this work the space and majesty it deserves. Firstly, Previn's superbly dark and foreboding account that has a timbre no other performance matches. Secondly Haitink, a magnificent reading from a conductor of huge international renown who benefits from a superbly clear digital recording that no other version can match.

For a desert island recommendation it would be André Previn.

Notes:

The quote from the Houston Examiner is given in full in Edward Johnson's article *Stokowski and Vaughan Williams* in RVW Society Journal No. 24.

The quote from Percy Grainger is taken from a letter he wrote to Ursula Vaughan Williams on September 25 1958. It is given in full in Edward Johnson's article.

The three quotations which headed my original survey in Journal No. 25 were as follows:

"*It is the work, not of a tired old man, but a very experienced one.*" (James Day)

"*Vaughan Williams, eschewing sentimentality, for the last time summons up those reserves which, for want of a better word, must be called visionary.*" (Michael Kennedy)

"*...at once, heroic and contemplative, defiant and wistfully absorbed, and largely visionary in tone.*" (Hugh Ottaway)

JULIETTE POCHIN sings at our AGM



The Society's AGM will be held this year on Sunday October 14 2007 at Denbies, near Dorking, starting at 2.30 pm. One of the soloists in our Albion song project, Juliette Pochin, will be giving a recital (see the programme below).

An event not to be missed!

Vaughan Williams

Boy Johnny - Life is full of care (Hugh the Drover)

Warlock

A Piper - The Fox

Vaughan Williams *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove*

Motion and Stillness - Four Nights

The New Ghost - The Water Mill

Quilter

Love's Philosophy - Crimson Petal

Howells

King David

Vaughan Williams

The sky above the roof - If I were Queen

ROLL OF HONOUR

The following members of the RVW Society have very generously contributed to our first Albion records:

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Without the support of these members
 our recording project would not have
 been possible.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND GEORGE HERBERT – A SURVEY

(A PRESENTATION FOR ST. BARNABAS' ADULT EDUCATION,
JANUARY 13 AND FEBRUARY 3, 2002)

by *Ronald E. Grames*



George Herbert (1593 - 1633)

Where George Herbert is relatively mysterious and certainly short-lived, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was neither. One of the greatest of twentieth-century musicians, and certainly the greatest English musician after Elgar, he lived a long and productive life, teaching, conducting, and of course, composing from his youth until his eighty-sixth year. He died peacefully a few months after the premiere of his Ninth Symphony, on the dawn of the day that he was to supervise its first recording.

He was born in the Cotswold village of Down Ampney, near Salisbury, to Arthur Vaughan Williams, an Anglican priest who had served his first curacy at George Herbert's parish in Bemerton. His mother, Margaret, was a Wedgwood (of china fame) and the niece of Charles Darwin, to whom she was close. He studied with Stanford and Parry, the leading English musicians of his day, as well as Max Bruch in Berlin and Maurice Ravel in France.

Everyone in this class knows some of Vaughan Williams' music. Everyone here who sings in Church has sung his music. He edited the *English Hymnal* and wrote and/or arranged a large number of the hymns included in that work. There are still twenty-seven listings for Vaughan Williams as composer or arranger in the 1982 Hymnal of the Episcopal Church. Three well-known examples are:

Sine Nomine (For all the saints, who from their labors rest) *Down Ampney* (Come down, O Love divine) *King's Weston* (At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow) (Vaughan Williams: Hymns, Cardiff Festival Choir, conducted by Owain Arwel Hughes, with Robert Court, organ, IMP Classics 30367 01222).

Vaughan Williams' music is not what we have come to expect from serious music of the twentieth century. He wrote well into the 1950s, a period where atonality was the norm, and a moving tune often suspect by the arbiters of taste. But where, in the first half of that century, composers such as Arnold Schoenberg were trying to find a new language to express the angst of a new world, Vaughan Williams was looking back to a musical language that would mourn the lost peace of a world we were leaving behind.

Schoenberg: Five Orchestral Pieces, Op.11 – First Movement (Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Daniel Barenboim, Teldec 4509-98256-2) Vaughan Williams: Symphony No.5 in D Major – Third Movement: *Romanza* (London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Bryden Thompson, Chandos CHAN 8554)

He would have vehemently denied such a programmatic interpretation, but the aching sadness (or fierce anger) of much of his music is a reflection on an England that was either being destroyed by wars and progress or had already been long gone. His music was shaped by several influences, including his two fine English teachers, but especially by the works of such great English composers as Tallis and Byrd, by the French composers Debussy and Ravel, and most especially by English folk songs. Vaughan Williams devoted many years to the collection of English folk music; to record it even as the oral traditions were dying in the early years of the twentieth century. He preserved over eight hundred songs, some of which he transformed into works of his own. Many others of his works sing with the voice of the folk song, even when the themes are original.

Vaughan Williams was also a student of English poetry and unlike most composers of his and the preceding century, he set the works of the great poets. The majority of the texts used by Vaughan Williams in his vocal and choral works were written by such masters as Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Spencer, Donne, Blake, Bunyan, and the seventeenth-century poet who is the topic of our discussion, George Herbert.

One of Vaughan Williams' earliest mature compositions was a setting of Herbert's verse, the first of *Three Elizabethan Partsongs*. This choral setting was written soon after he finished his studies with Stanford, and before his studies in Europe. It is not Vaughan Williams' speaking in a master's voice, but already one can hear his characteristic response to George Herbert's poetry:

Sweet Day

Sweet day! so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
For thou must die.

[Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
Thy root is ever, ever in its grave,
And thou must die.]*

Sweet spring! full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie,
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

* not set by Vaughan Williams

(Vaughan Williams: Over Hill, Over Dale, Holst Singers
conducted by Stephen Layton, Hyperion CDA66777)

Another setting, for the *English Hymnal* is, interestingly enough,
one of the few Herbert settings that he produced for that work:

Teach me, My God and King

Teach me, my God and king,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything,
to do it as for thee:

A man that looks on glass,
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
and then the heaven espy.

All same of Thee partake;
nothing can be so mean
which with this tincture, "for thy sake,"
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone,
that turneth all to gold:
for that which God doth touch and own
cannot for less be told.

(Vaughan Williams: Hymns, Cardiff Festival Choir, conducted by
Owain Arwel Hughes, with Robert Court, organ, IMP Classics
30367 01222).

Vaughan Williams' largest setting of the works of George Herbert
is his song cycle *Five Mystical Songs* for baritone, chorus and
orchestra. He also arranged the work for baritone and piano. The
work is generally considered one of his early masterpieces. The

verses are simple and direct and so is Vaughan Williams' response
to them. As a result, what could be a highly sentimental work is
instead a work of great power and sensuality. The piano setting
has, in addition, a delicacy that suits the verses well. The work
was written between 1906 and 1911, just before his First
Symphony.

A note here: *The Call*, song four of the cycle, is the only Herbert
setting by Vaughan Williams that was included in our 1982
Hymnal.

Easter

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen.
Sing his praise without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that though likewise
With him may'st rise:
That, as his death calcined thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part
With all thy art.
The cross taught all wood to resound his name
Who bore the same.
His stretched sinews taught all strings what key
Is best to celebrate this most high day

Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song
Pleasant and long:
Or since all music is by three part vied,
And multiplied;
O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,
And make up our defects with his sweet art.

I got me flowers

I got me flowers to strew thy way;
I got me boughs off many a tree:
But thou wast up by break of day,
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The sun arising in the east,
Though he give light, and the East perfume;
If they should offer to contest
With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,
Though many suns to shine endeavor?
We count three hundred, but we miss:
There is but one, and that one ever.

Love bade me welcome

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.

Journal of the RVW Society

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

The Call

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, My Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a heart, as joys in love.

Antiphon

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King.

The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly:
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may Grow

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King.

The Church with psalms must shout,
No door can keep them out:
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part..

Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King.

(John Shirley-Quirk, baritone; English Chamber Orchestra, Choir of King's College, Cambridge conducted by Sir David Willcocks, EMI CDM 7 69949 2)

(Simon Keenlyside, baritone, Graham Johnson, piano, Collins Classics 14882)

Vaughan Williams' last setting of a George Herbert verse was as a part of a Christmas cantata entitled *Hodie*. The work includes settings of scripture, the Book of Common Prayer, and poems by Milton, Coverdale, Hardy, Drummond, and his wife Ursula, herself an accomplished poet. Despite his advanced age – he was 82 when he wrote it – it is a work of great power and vigor. There is also a sparseness and a serenity about the music that is typical of Vaughan Williams' later works. In all, *Hodie* speaks in a very different musical language than the *Five Mystical Songs*, written 43 years earlier. It says much, then, about the spiritual bond that Vaughan Williams must have felt with Herbert's poetry, that this setting bears so many similarities to that of the other Herbert settings, made almost half a century earlier.

Pastoral

The shepherds sing: and shall I silent be?
My God, no hymn for thee?
My soul's a shepherd too: a flock it feeds
Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.
The pasture is thy Word: the streams, thy Grace
Enriching all the place.

Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers
Out-sing the daylight hours.
Then we will chide the sun for letting night
Take up his place and right;
We sing one common Lord; wherefore he should
Himself the candle hold.

I will go searching, till I find a sun
Shall stay till we have done;
A willing shiner, that shall shine as gladly
As frost-nipt suns look sadly.
Then we will sing, and shine all our own day,
And one another pay;
His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine
Till even his beams sing, and my music shine.

(John Shirley-Quirk, baritone; London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir David Willcocks, EMI CDM 5 67427 2)

And so ended what was, perhaps, an unlikely partnership: the Christian mystic, singing God's praise out of his heart's certainty and the Christian agnostic, searching through poetry and his music for his soul's harbor. Their great arts "twined" in these eight works, and perhaps in Herbert's spirituality Vaughan Williams' "breast" was "cheered". Certainly, great as Herbert's verse is on its own, it is in Vaughan Williams' settings that it most richly sings. And glorious as are his many other works, nowhere more brightly than in these settings of Herbert's verse does Vaughan Williams' music shine.

Crossword Solutions:**Across:**

1. Oxford, 4. Elegy, 7. PV (Paul Verlaine), 8. Bar, 9. Cha, 10. Flourish, 12. SAE, 13. End, 14. Claribel, 16. Red, 17. Eye, 18. GC (Gordon Clinton), 19. Organ, 20. Tussle,

Down:

1. Oboe Concerto, 2. Fantasia, 3. Devil, 5. Ear, 6. Youth and Love, 8. Brumel, 10. Feline, 11. In Dreams 15. Eight, 17. Egg.

RVW and the CROSS

by John Francis



“This shall be a sign in thy head, a memorial between thine eyes to lighten thy countenance”.

Yesterday I found myself in a small First World War cemetery at St. Pol-sur-Ternoise, West of Béthune and Arras. The dead were mostly British, including three young men shot at dawn, but several Commonwealth countries are represented, and just two *inconnu* sons of France. I was struck by the great number of graves that post-dated the armistice, and it was a reminder that bronchitis, pneumonia and above all influenza went on taking lives well into 1919.

Vaughan Williams could have passed that way, but I have no reason to suppose that he did, so why think of him? I very much enjoyed Eric Seddon’s erudite yet approachable exploration of the iconography in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as published in the last Journal, and I feel sure that, even though the genesis of the opera goes back at least to 1906, Vaughan Williams’ war experience must have had a great influence on it, and on all that he did and thought for the rest of his life.

The “Cross Icon”, as I am sure we all know by now, is a four note trumpet call, in triple time, so that the emphasis is on the first and last notes. If you like old Westerns, close your eyes, and imagine the encircled cowboys hearing that call. The cavalry is on the way! Surely, that analogy is appropriate. The cross is a symbol of sacrifice, of salvation, of a greater power taking control, coming to the rescue.

To the extent that masterpieces did not begin to appear until he was in his mid-thirties, Vaughan Williams was a slow developer. Some of those early works, *Toward the Unknown Region* (1907) and the *Sea Symphony* (1909), were inspired by the poetry of Whitman. Though the composer famously suggested that a man might just want to write a piece of music, these pieces are more than that. There was a philosophy that must have been well developed by that age. He read, he thought, he was inspired by beauty of every kind. Not for him the office grind that justifies

putting off any kind of challenging thinking to another day. As he finally began to blossom as a composer, he was confronted by war.

Did he scuttle off to compose abroad in peace? No, though too old at 42 to be called up, he volunteered, and served in the Field Ambulance Service. We cannot measure the extent to which this kind, thoughtful, man was devastated by what he saw; we are limited by our own experiences and imaginations. He tended men and boys who were sick, dying, maimed and gassed, and saw so much destruction. I wonder, could he have witnessed a young man standing up to face a dawn firing squad? Could he have seen into his eyes?

Returning from that carnage, to an England that was changed for ever, having seen the full extent of man’s inhumanity to man, was Vaughan Williams interested in salvation as a concept? I think so: not necessarily in a Christian sense – there is no evidence that he engaged with the particularly Christian belief in resurrection – but in a triumph over and rejection of evil, in redemption of a corrupt mankind, surely the great theme of Bunyan’s book.

*Thou shalt be secure because there is hope,
Yea, thou shalt take rest in safety.
Yea, thou shalt lie down and none shall make thee afraid.
And in this place thou shalt find peace.*

If anybody loved his neighbour, throughout his life, I think it was Vaughan Williams. He was born with the proverbial silver spoon, but his generosity was legendary. From Sir George Dyson (*Musical Times*, October 1958): “He was instantly ready to support from his own purse the many appeals...that came to him. Indeed it was sometimes difficult to persuade him that some causes were more deserving than others. His instinct was to help first and judge later, a trait of character occasionally too optimistic, but always endearing.” He embodied “Christian” (actually humanitarian) values to such an extent that Christians are perhaps just disappointed that he was not a paid up member.

Michael Kennedy reminded us, at the recent symposium, that for great creative artists like Vaughan Williams, their art is a religion; he needed no other. I think he’s right about that, but his great humanity drew inspiration from many sources, including the Authorised Bible, Shakespeare, poets including Whitman, and from the legacy of English church music and English folk-song. Who can say what memories played at those winter evensongs in the closing years? It is improbable that he believed in an after-life, or Heaven. But he had seen Hell, and spent the rest of his life resolving that appalling experience.

*Put up thy curtains, look within my veil,
Turn up my metaphors and do not fail
There if thou seekest them, such things to find
As will be helpful to an honest mind.*

Turn up my Metaphors Wishfully

by Jeffrey Aldridge

I am indebted to Eric Seddon for his thoughtful examination of *The Pilgrim's Progress* that appeared in the March 2007 issue of the Journal. It has certainly rekindled my interest in the work and in my determination to obtain a recording for myself. I have heard Boulton's 1971 recording and I saw a performance in Edinburgh a few years ago, but I cannot claim anything like a decent knowledge of what is clearly a major work.

Similarly, I was impressed by what Mr. Seddon had to say about Vaughan Williams' relationship with Percy Dearmer and the interconnections that linked the composer's father, who died when Vaughan Williams was still a young child, with the family of Adeline, Vaughan Williams' first wife. It is fascinating to speculate on the ways in which all of these contributed to the composer's spiritual development.

This brings me to what Mr. Seddon wrote in the June 2006 issue, in response to some words of mine which clearly upset him: "Vaughan Williams apparently was not much in sympathy with the Oxford Movement and Anglo-Catholicism – the 'bells and smells' wing – so there is a certain irony in the fact that it was that wing that "took up" the English Hymnal..." He goes on to say that Dearmer was Anglo-Catholic, that this branch of the church lay behind the project for a new hymnal and that Dearmer and Vaughan Williams shared many outlooks. He adds that my summation of Anglo-Catholicism as the "bells and smells wing" reveals my superficial dismissal of the Oxford Movement and Anglo-Catholicism in general. On this last point, may I state that, while my position now is one of fairly cheerful agnosticism, I was brought up in the Anglo-Catholic tradition and that I am deeply sympathetic to that tradition and a lover of Anglo-Catholic ritual, including the bells and smells. For me this is matched only by the equally lovely rituals of the Greek and, particularly, Russian churches. If Mr. Seddon has never met the term "bells and smells" before, I can only assume he spends nearly all his time in the USA where, for all I know, the phrase may not be used. I have heard it used many times over the years, most often from the lips of clergy. He should also note that I used the word "apparently" in the remark quoted. I said that because I had picked up something written by Wilfrid Mellers in *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*. I cannot place it now since I don't have a copy to hand; let it suffice that I assumed Professor Mellers' knowledge in this matter was greater than my own, so I took his word for it.

Let me look now at Mr. Seddon's opening remarks in the March issue which seem to me somewhat more contentious (partly, no doubt, because I find myself cited once more). Following a reference to my analogy with the work of Stravinsky (*Oedipus Rex* being a pagan myth set to music by a Christian believer), Mr

Seddon writes this: "The supposition is that Vaughan Williams saw Christian texts as mere symbols among many others; that a Jungian type of syncretism was at work." This is only partly true: it seems to me perfectly possible for a non-Christian to see such as texts as symbols, but not merely as symbols. Christianity is full of symbols – one would not dismiss the Cross as a "mere" symbol; Anglo-Catholicism is saturated in symbols (I hesitate to

mention the symbolic values attached to certain bells and smells.)

Vaughan Williams was an artist. Artists create symbols; that is what they are about. The visual arts, poetry and music are crammed full of symbols; they may be called metaphors, they may be called representations or icons or visions. Whether or not there is an Ultimate, it is the job of a creative artist to reach out to it. This is why Hans Keller once said that all great art is religious. He did not add that all great artists have to be believers. It is clear that Vaughan Williams was a seeker after truth and in so doing he did not provide "mere" anything. An artist such as he was is less likely, for instance, to believe in the literal truth of, say, the Bible but to reach for its message. To take the obvious example, I doubt he believed in the literal truth of Genesis, with the universe created in six days and Eve coming from Adam's rib and the whole business with the Tree of

Knowledge, but he *would* accept their truth as metaphor. Truths do not have to be factual. This goes, not just for Adam and Eve but also for Oedipus and Jocasta.

Mr. Seddon quotes a translation of St John of the Cross's magnificent poem that begins "En una noche oscura" which, like the Song of Solomon, symbolises the writer's love of God in terms of an erotic quest. A "mere" symbol? Hardly. But like Bernini's statue in Rome of this St John's friend, St Teresa of Avila, it is unforgettably powerful. St John was obviously a believer, as, so I believe, was Bernini.

I do not think that I have been exclusively secular or materialist in any of my comments (another of Mr. Seddon's charges, though not just against me.) The next paragraph goes on to set up further targets to be shot at, none of which, as far as I know, has been seriously advanced: "...the meaning of his scores has been dominated by the a priori assumption that they might only be said to express what scholars can prove he definitely believed." Who has asserted this? By its nature, music is the most abstract of the arts, even when supporting words. (In this regard, let me cite an interesting statement by Mr. Seddon in this very article: "First, it is a perfect aural representation of the Cross: usually appearing Do-Re-Sol-Do in triplet figure." Now this is a memorable conjunction of notes but I can't see why it is a perfect aural representation of the Cross, any more than any other similar

THE OXEN

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy

conjunction.) Since I do not know what Vaughan Williams meant beyond the notes (“I don’t know if I like it but it is what I meant”; “Why can’t people accept that someone might just write a symphony?”) I certainly make no such assumption.



Benjamin Britten: should he be reconsidered too?

Mr. Seddon goes on: “This proposition can only be maintained by yet another assumption: that reality is only definable by individual perception (thus making radical subjectivism the only possible criteri(on) for determining reality), coupled with the reductive assertion that a work of art might only contain what an artist could consciously define and verbally articulate.” Again, I do not know of a single commentator on Vaughan Williams, or any other composer for

that matter, who makes such an assertion. Plenty of artists state very different positions: “A poet may well include meanings that he did not know were there.” Seddon’s assertions merely set up skittles in order to knock them down.

Including this one: “This exclusion of theological analysis has resulted in a shallow reading of Vaughan Williams’ music, ultimately creating, in theory, an abundance of “problem” pieces: *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Hodie*, the Magnificat and *Sancta Civitas* come immediately to mind.” Now what is “problematic” about these pieces? The first, pre-echoing Britten’s *War Requiem*, is an anti-war piece that includes elements of Christian text, alongside Walt Whitman and John Bright. Britten, incidentally, was also agnostic, though we learn (from Peter Pears, I think) that, near the end of his life, he took Communion from his friend the Bishop of Ipswich, but more out of care for his friend than any belief in the sacrament. Is the *War Requiem* a “Christian” work? It presents the whole of the Requiem Mass, for sure, and very powerfully, but, equally powerfully, undercuts its force by the juxtaposition of Wilfred Owen’s poetry and a careful cross-referencing of musical

themes. If there is all this fuss about Vaughan Williams’ beliefs, what about Ben? After all, he wrote, a *Missa Brevis*, *A Ceremony of Carols*, *Rejoice in the Lamb*, *Cantata Misericordium* as well as dramatic works such as *Noyes Fludde* and the three Church operas. Even *The Rape of Lucretia* is given a Christian framing. Yet somehow people don’t talk of as a Christian composer but concentrate on his politics, his obsession with the loss of innocence and, sometimes, of his sexuality. Perhaps Mr. Seddon thinks that we should reconsider this composer too.

Back to Vaughan Williams. *Hodie* is a Christmas Cantata which, unusually for such a piece, contains Hardy’s *The Oxen*, an explicitly agnostic poem. Is that a problem? If it is, it is one deliberately created by the composer – he did not have to include the setting in the cantata. I can see no “problems” with the other works cited, either, beyond the famous quotation from Plato which, however it is interpreted, is hardly Christian. As for *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, any problems for me associated with the work do not concern its theology; rather – and I am working from memory here – they lie in the nature of the drama itself. It did seem to contain long stretches of a similar tempo and “feel”; the “exceptions”, the fight with Apollyon and the Vanity Fair scene, did not convince when I saw the production. Remember, too, that the work is a long one. It may be instructive to cite Britten again by taking the example of *Curlew River*. This is also a work with no great *Allegro* sections or rumbustiousness; on the contrary, it maintains its “feel” throughout. Yet, at fifty minutes or so it does not outstay its welcome and, with the dramatic change of music (the introduction of a boy treble) as the Child’s Ghost answers the Madwoman, a spine-tingling climax is reached to the work. That said, I don’t think Britten is any good at “Vanity Fair” scenes either: easily the weakest parts of *The Burning Fiery Furnace* and *The Prodigal Son* are those sections of feasting and debauchery that are supposed to be so reprehensible.

I am grateful, as I said, to Mr Seddon for his thoughtful and perceptive insights. However, he must not wilfully misinterpret what others write; they are seekers too.

HUGH THE DROVER IN YORK, OCTOBER 2007

“Set in the rolling Cotswolds and packed with rollicking tunes, Vaughan Williams’ first opera, ‘Hugh the Drover’, ought to be a mainstream part of our musical heritage, a sort of British Bartered Bride.” So wrote Martin Dreyer in 1995 in his review of York Opera’s second production of this work. This October will see the company’s third production of *Hugh the Drover*, this time in York’s beautiful Theatre Royal.

On the two previous occasions when the company has performed this opera it has been remarkably popular with singers, both soloists and choristers, and the current membership is thrilled at the chance to sing this delightful work again. We hope that we shall be joined, as in 1981 and 1995, by members of the Ebor Morris Men. We were honoured to welcome Ursula Vaughan Williams to our first production in 1981 and again in 1995. Following her first visit she agreed to become a Vice-President of our company and is now its Patron. York Opera has performed Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *The First Nowell* in York Minster, Ripon Cathedral, and Selby Abbey, and more recently in the National Centre for Early Music in York. Among our Christmas choral concerts we regularly include the *Fantasia on Christmas*

Carols – so we are well acquainted with the composer’s style of vocal writing. We have also performed other English operas, notably *Albert Herring* and *Peter Grimes*, for which we received great critical acclaim.

Many of us in York Opera consider it a national disgrace that *Hugh the Drover* is not regularly performed by our English professional companies, despite excellent recordings being available. Perhaps someone with some influence will see our production in October and realize the opera’s beauty and charm and give it its proper place in the ranks of English opera. *Hugh the Drover* will be performed in the Theatre Royal, York, on October 9, 10, 12 and 13 2007. The contact for tickets (they will also be available from the Theatre Royal later on) is Richard Shouksmith on 01904 490303. We hope that many RVW Society members will want to join us – especially on Friday October 12, the composer’s birthday.

Pauline Chadwick,
York Opera
www.yorkopera.org.uk

CELEBRATING VAUGHAN WILLIAMS IN 2008

As the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams approaches there will be many celebrations, including performances of his symphonies, the choral works and perhaps even the neglected masterpiece *Job*.

Naturally, much of this will take place in the larger cities, with London, of course, being its central point. As the Society's Regional Chairman for East Anglia and someone who is also involved in the annual arts festival in the north Suffolk market town of Halesworth, I have been wondering whether those in smaller towns like this one, perhaps with a thriving music society, might be able to celebrate the anniversary, even if in a more humble way and without the vast outlay of large orchestral and choral resources. It is an ideal opportunity for Vaughan Williams' music to be performed to those who may have heard little before. It is well known that in 1908, Vaughan Williams went off to study with Ravel. The three-month sojourn was fruitful. He famously remarked that he "came home with a bad attack of French fever" which resulted in the first String Quartet and the song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*. The admiration was not all one way. Ravel remarked that Vaughan Williams was the only pupil not to write music like his and the friendship between the two composers continued with Ravel's visit to London in 1912 to stay with Ralph and Adeline being a great success. It could be said that Vaughan Williams' decision to study with Ravel was perhaps as daring as Britten's attempt to study with Berg some twenty years later, and in his forward to the second edition reissue of *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* Michael Kennedy remarks that if he were to revise the book he might well have laid more stress on the influence of Ravel which he believed "to be of prime importance"

in the development of Vaughan Williams' music. So why not celebrate this connection nationally in the shires, "in the sticks" and in the smaller towns dotted around the land? The programme would comprise:

Vaughan Williams: String Quartet No 1

Vaughan Williams: *On Wenlock Edge*

Ravel: String Quartet in F

The artists involved are likely to be the award-winning young Carducci String Quartet and the pianist Nicola Eimer, winner of the 2005 Overseas League Piano Competition. By the time this Journal reaches you I will be in a position to name the proposed tenor. The Carducci Quartet has recently been studying the Ravel Quartet with Hugh McGuire as part of the Aldeburgh String Quartets in residence. Their performance of it in the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh was magnificent. Having discussed the project with them, they are very enthusiastic and told me that they have performed *On Wenlock Edge* several times too and are very keen to undertake the Quartet No. 1 to complete the project. It would be wonderful if this concert could be performed several times through the anniversary year in the sort of venues I have outlined and at a cost that is within the reach of many small music societies. If you are an RVW Society area chairman, or help to run a music club, please contact me for further details. In modern parlance, this anniversary concert performed across the country "is eminently doable"!

John Treadway,

East Anglian Chairman.

Tel/Fax: 01986 798324

TRACING A MAGICAL PERFORMANCE

by Linda Hayward

One of my most treasured possessions is a second-hand vocal score of Vaughan Williams' opera *The Poisoned Kiss*. I had acquired it early in my discovery of his music and found it was a rarity. Not only that, but my copy was signed on the title page by R. Vaughan Williams, Evelyn Sharp, Hubert Foss, and Robert Percival, and the name of its previous owner, F. A. Britton, appeared at the top of the page. The score had been bound in dark blue cloth, and had been used for a working performance. There had been cuts and changes to the libretto as pages were bound together with paper and different words typed and attached to certain other pages. I longed to know when the performance had taken place, where it had taken place, and who F. A. Britton was. Someone connected to the production, I reasoned, because of the signatures on the score.

My first stop was the British Library, where the gentleman from the music department got quite excited, as my copy represented a performance, whereas the one in their music library was pristine and had never been used. He looked up any musicians with the name "Britton". There were two likely candidates, Frank Britton, and Frederick Britton. Frank was a professor of pianoforte at the Royal Academy of Music – could he have been the rehearsal pianist for the production? Frederick was involved with singing, and the director of the Hyde Choral Society. Did he help with training the chorus in this performance? I was not sure who Robert Percival was, but I suspected that he was the conductor of the production in question. A little research informed me that he

was a teacher of elocution and singing, as well as being the musical director of the Bristol Opera School from 1922 onwards. The entry in the reference book gave his address in Bristol. It was a stone's throw away from the Bristol University campus; maybe there was a connection. In the meantime, I thought that I had found a short cut to my researches when I met Diana Sparkes, Hubert Foss's daughter. She was good enough to look through her father's papers, but was unable to find a reference to a performance involving Robert Percival or F. A. Britton. So I wrote to Bristol University asking if there had been a Robert Percival working at the University at any time. They were extremely helpful. Although they informed me that Robert Percival had never been connected with the University, they passed my query on to the archivist of Bristol Opera, who tracked down the production. It took place in November 1937, at Bristol Opera School, and F. A. Britton was Florence A. Britton who took part as one of the three mediums. The Bristol Evening Post, dated November 2 1937, gave a favourable review. It mentioned Florence Britton, and many others involved, and stated that the "presentation should do much to further popularise Dr. Vaughan Williams' music in the West." Ralph Vaughan Williams and Hubert Foss were vice presidents of Bristol Opera School, hence the reason for their interest in the production. The detective work took some years but was worth the effort. However I could not have found the answers without the help and goodwill of those who were willing to put themselves out on my behalf, and I thank them all.

FOOTSTEPS

“...A FEELING OF SHEER HOPELESSNESS...”

Stephen Connock follows Vaughan Williams and the 2/4 London Ambulance to Salonika – the “City of Ghosts”

Vaughan Williams and his colleagues in the Royal Army Medical Corps may have felt that the 60th Division's move from Vimy Ridge to Salonika in Northern Greece would have yielded warmer weather. They would have been wrong. The orders for the 60th Division to be relieved in Northern France by the 3rd Canadian Division were received on October 19th 1916 but the soldiers were not informed until November 1st (Dalbiac, p. 63). Embarkation from Marseilles began on November 1st but it was not until December 12th that all the troops were at sea. Vaughan Williams arrived in Northern Greece at 11.30 am on the 11th of December (War Diary 11.12.16) and walked the 3 kilometres or so from the beach to Katerini.



Illustration 1: The Beach near Katerini where the 2/4 London Ambulance landed in Dec. 1916

In Winter this is a wild coastline (see Illustrations 1 and 2): Mount Olympus is too far away to provide shelter. The plain between the mountain range in the East and the Gulf of Salonika is nine miles across at its widest point and 17½ miles long. Even today it is inhospitable with marshland and swamp. In 1917 it was very unforgiving: “The ‘Vardus’ wind blows for 4 or 5 days with unrelenting fury, followed by torrential rains and these, in turn, were superseded by a period of bitterly damp and cold weather.” (Milne, p. 59)



Illustration 2: The Beach near Katerini - with later housing

The 2/4 London Ambulance, along with the 179th Brigade

generally, (part of the 60th Division) took a fearful battering on arrival in Greece. At 08.00 on the 12th December 1916 the sea was so rough that all the lighters were sent back to Solonika, 30 miles away. No rations could be unloaded so the men lived on iron rations until the 13th December. The soldiers had to wade ashore, waist deep for over 70 yards and most baggage was washed overboard. (Dalbiac, p.70)



Illustration 3: Katerini Station - virtually unchanged since 1916

With the city of Salonika already overwhelmed by allied troops, Katerini had been chosen to locate the 60th Division. There were around 7000 people living there in 1912, plus over 1300 Greek refugees. Major J B Layton, Commander of the 2/4 London Ambulance, surveyed the village gloomily:

The town of Katerini is very insanitary; refuse, faeces and manure are lying all over the place. Flies are already present and typhoid is present amongst the civil population. (War Diary 15th January 1917)



Illustration 4: Katerini Station

Major Layton concluded:

In a short time, the conditions which exist near the town will be of far greater danger to the lives of the troops than a brigade of enemy artillery. (War Diary 19th January 1917)

No wonder the Gods decided to vacate Mount Olympus some years before!

By the 12th March 1917, Major Layton was worried about the approach of summer:

In warm weather the whole town is probably so unhealthy that no troops should be left in the town if possible. (War Diary 12th March 1917)

He was right to be fearful. Lt. Gen. Sir George Milne recounts in his book *The Salonika Front* that:

During the first summer months our men did not fail to suffer from the first experience of the debilitating effect of the Balkan climate. Over 3000 malaria stricken British soldiers were admitted to Casualty Clearing Stations in one day from two Divisions on the Struma front (North West of Salonika). (Milne, p.145)



Illustration 5: Katerini today

Back in January, the 2/4 London Ambulance set about improving the water supply and sanitation, attending to latrines and generally cleaning up the grounds of the town. Vaughan Williams had his fair share of routine and unpleasant work:

We went on mosquito squad work which consisted of filling in puddles to prevent mosquitoes breeding; VW thought this useful in an abstract way. (Steggles, quoted in Aldous p.8)

Today there is little in Katerini to indicate this activity, but the town remains a dour and unpleasant place (see illustrations 5). It is not a surprise to note that the town does not appear in most tourist guides to Greece.



Illustration 6: The White Tower at Thessalonika

Fears of summer in Katerini were not fulfilled as on 5th March 1917 the 179th Brigade (and 2/4 London Ambulance) received orders to rejoin the 60th Division on the Doirani front, North of Salonika. (Dalbiac, p.70) Vaughan Williams was in the second column moving on 8th March 1917. The troops marched North across the plain, arriving at Tuala (11th March), Livanovon (12th March), Amatova (15th March) Karasuli (16th March) to their destination of Kalinova on 19th March 1917. A Main Dressing Station was set up at Kalinova and Advanced Dressing Station (ADS) at Clichy Ravine. This consisted of one large dressing room, a large dugout for patients and one cookhouse. (War Diary 19th March 1917)



Illustration 7: Salonika port from which RVW departed in June 1917

On the 13th March, on the road to Amatova, the weather broke shortly after the Brigade crossed the River Vardur at Topsin. "Fierce storms of sleet and piercing wind" (Dalbiac p.75) forced the men to advance in single file, knee-deep in mud. It took six hours to get to Karasuli – a journey that should have taken 2 – and the Brigade arrived at 1.00 am. Worse was to come. A second storm blew up, near hurricane force, with a blinding snowstorm. It was impossible to pitch tents so the order came to move on that night.

All had to breast the blinding snow, and what was worse the piercing hurricane of wind, and keep on... (Dalbiac, p.75)

Kalinova was finally reached on 18-19 March. The 100-mile "Katerini trek" had taken a dreadful toll – 2 had died from exposure on the march.

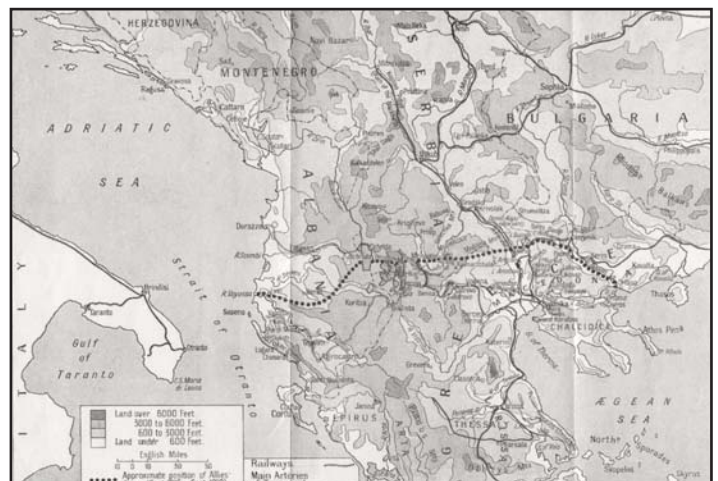


Illustration 8: The front line north of Salonika in late 1917

Preparations were now made for the forthcoming battle. The 60th Division was holding 10 miles of front line (see map), whilst the

Journal of the RVW Society

179th Brigade – including Vaughan Williams and the 2/4 London Ambulance, held sectors F, H and I.

The 2/4 London Ambulance had relay posts for ambulance wagons between the advanced and main dressing stations and owing to the long distances and difficulties of the track. (Dalbiac, p.95)

The fighting on the Doiriana front reached its peak in the last week of April 1917, with the Ambulance dealing with most wounded men on 24-25 April. 17 were killed and over 100 wounded – there is no record of the Bulgarian death toll. The Bulgars counter-attacked on 10th May but the 179th Brigade held its position, despite continuous shelling, until it was relieved by 26th Division on 5th June. (Dalbiac, p.104)

The 179th Brigade had finished its work in Greece. On 20th June the men left for Alexandria, with a last look at the White Tower in Salonika (see illustrations 6 and 7). Vaughan Williams was not with them – he was about to embark on training as an officer in the artillery.

Looking back at their period in Salonika, and the appalling weather, the men remembered the malaria and dysentery rather than the fighting, along with:

...a feeling of sheer hopelessness inspired by the strongly fortified mountain barrier. (Milne, p.146)

Today, Salonika has rightly been called a “City of Ghosts”. (Mazower) The Great Fire of 1917 destroyed three-quarters of the City. A modern, cosmopolitan place has emerged but the swamps and dreadful weather persist, sending a deep chill through the visitor as it did the troops 90 years earlier.

References

Dalbiac: Col. P H. Dalbiac, *History of the 60th Division*, Allan and Unwin, 1927

Mazower: Mark Mazower, *Salonica – City of Ghosts*, Harper Perennial 2005

Milne: Lt. Gen. Sir George Milne, *The Salonika Front*, A&C Black, 1920

Steggles: Henry Steggles, *Royal College of Music Magazine*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (1959)

War Diaries: All the *War Diaries* of the 2/4 London Ambulance in Salonika are at WO 95/4927 in the Public Records Office, London

See also the excellent article by Alan Aldous, *RVW in Salonika*, in Journal 16 of the RVW Society.

(Stephen Connock visited Salonika and Katarini on 25-26 March 2007)

Letters

We are always pleased to receive contributions for this page

SPIRITUAL MATTERS

I should like to thank Eric Seddon for another very fine and perceptive contribution to the February Journal. Members (and all Vaughan Williams lovers) now need to think seriously about what he is saying. Having read the *Pilgrim* article and then reread his earlier material, and *National Music*, it's clear to me that Vaughan Williams' music (and the words he set) show very clearly that much of his work was firmly focused on communicating the Christian (and high church specifically) messages to his audience. But this is just one facet of Vaughan Williams. Music was also his “religion” as Michael Kennedy says and he strived to use music in all its forms to improve the musical experiences of people, especially in this country. Hopefully people won't react so defensively in the letters page this time!

One other thought (only a thought!) – the significance of “Dives and Lazarus” – the music and the parable. This music awakened his love of folk music, was set beautifully in his *Five Variants* and was played at his funeral on his instruction – along with extracts from *Job*, Bach etc. Did he have the parable at the back of his mind, making him determined to follow the path of Lazarus and avoid being the rich man – Dives – who eventually went to Hell? These couple of sentences describe this too simply and flippantly but it's something to ponder on given the significance to him.

Turning to other matters, the great Ninth Symphony, having re-

listened to many recordings over the past few weeks, for me it is Previn's account, particularly in the final movement, that most eloquently sets out this last great statement of Vaughan Williams' spiritual quest with him facing altar and icons of a great cathedral or the star-filled sky. You can hear the beauty of the scoring best in the Previn, though Stokowski and Haitink are tremendous too.

Finally to the dangers of using quotes as evidence of the truth. In several books I've seen references to Vaughan Williams' quote that Mahler “was a tolerable imitation of a composer” (including as a stick to attack Vaughan Williams by the sycophantic critics that attached themselves to Britten.) I stumbled on the full quote when reading *National Music*. What Vaughan Williams actually said, in the context of singing the merits of other composers who were also conductors (namely Wagner and Brahms), that being a musician “made even Mahler into a very tolerable imitation of a composer”. For me, in his typically understated and light-hearted way Vaughan Williams is saying that Mahler was a composer of stature, comparing him alongside Wagner and Brahms. (He would probably describe himself as a tolerable imitation if it was a self-quotation, or something worse. But he wouldn't really mean it.)

*Andy Whisker,
Wakefield, West Yorkshire, U.K.*

MORE

Eric Seddon takes me to task for writing in my article, critical of his, “[Seddon] asserts that [*The Pilgrim's Progress*] would be transformed into an overwhelming masterpiece if a cross was included in the staging”. I have had another look at his original article and the stage directions and have no idea how I came to that conclusion. It was a pure, unvarnished howler. I apologise to Eric Seddon without qualification. However, for him to expect me

to be familiar with other articles he has written on this subject is a bit unfair, especially as I was unaware of their existence.

Having eaten humble pie, I have to say that I stand by the other criticisms I made of his article, especially his weighting evidence in either direction to suit his argument. Forensically, they just do not stand up.

Dr Gavin Bullock,
Winchester, UK.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

It feels strange to be writing to myself, but it seemed the best way to bring up a subject which two members have raised since the appearance of the last Journal. Several contributors have mentioned research they are pursuing on matters related to Vaughan Williams. I should like to publish an article next time about these different projects so that members can know what to look forward to. So if you are engaged in such a project, especially if a book is likely to appear, please get in touch and let me know about it. I will then put an article together myself, or indeed anyone else who wants to could do so.

William Hedley,
Castelnaudary, France.

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

It's interesting to notice how often classical works turn up as incidental music to films and television programmes and often in the most unexpected places. Recently, I noticed the use of Alan Hovhaness's symphony *City of Light* being used in a documentary. No credit was given at the end of course, which is often the case, and a subject I've written on before for the Journal.

A few days ago I came across another case. The *Thomas Tallis Fantasia* was used quite extensively in the epic film *Master and Commander*. The film starred Russell Crowe and was a heart-warming tale of a ship's captain and his crew in the Napoleonic Wars. The *Fantasia* was used twice, on both occasions when something tragic had occurred. On the second occasion the ship's captain was surveying the members of the crew who had been lost in a recent action with a French man o'war. The music added greatly to the atmosphere and seemed particularly appropriate to the sombre mood. I've not considered the *Tallis Fantasia* as a sombre requiem before, but on this occasion it certainly worked well – and made a refreshing change from the Barber *Adagio* which is so often used on these occasions. So full marks to those who selected music for the film.

As is invariably the case with film – but not with television – the piece was credited in the end titles. The print was rather small however, and definitely much smaller than the name of the composer of original music for the film whose name was emblazoned across the screen following that of the director – and whose music was particularly unmemorable and sank without trace in my opinion (if you'll pardon the pun.)

So, keep watching out for Vaughan Williams in strange places, as it's surprising where he pops up. By the way, talking incidental music, did anyone see that excellent documentary on Zeppelins of the First World War? The ominous music accompanying their

attacks was very atmospheric, but as usual not credited. I emailed *Timewatch* to ask what it was but nothing was forthcoming.

Rob Furneaux,
Devon, U.K.

RVW IN CANTERBURY

I thought it would be of interest to members that Canterbury Choral Society (of which I am a member) will be performing the *Sea Symphony* on October 27 2007 in the cathedral as part of the Canterbury Festival. And in our summer concert, on June 23rd, also in the cathedral, we sang *Toward the Unknown Region* as well as Britten's *Spring Symphony* in a programme also including Elgar's *Enigma Variations*.

We have booked Terry Barfoot, who organised the recent symposium on Vaughan Williams, Elgar and religion, to give a talk on the *Sea Symphony* at a date to be announced later.

More information about the Canterbury Choral Society can be found online at: www.canterburychoral.co.uk

Mary Druce,
Kent, U.K.

SIR MALCOLM ARNOLD

I read with considerable interest William Hedley's article concerning the recent DVD release of *Toward the Unknown Region*, which indeed was a fascinating look into the diverse world of Malcolm Arnold. Having seen the DVD, I would certainly recommend it as essential viewing.

By all accounts Arnold was a strange kettle of fish in both his personal life and in his extensive musical output. I certainly believe that somewhere amongst the bewildering array of pieces is a great composer trying to get out. I say this because his music, although excellently crafted, and burgeoning with ideas, in many instances seems to fall short on cogency and consistency. I am not saying that it is bad music – far from it – but it seems to me that Arnold has problems in crossing the line from the interesting to the profound. Often, he comes up with a wonderful theme or motif, only to bludgeon it to death with a sudden change of mood which does not merely contrast, but seems to destroy the good work done so far.

There are lots of examples: The Three Hand Piano Concerto has a central movement which opens with a gorgeous lilting theme returning at the movement's close. The central section however, completely dispels the wonderful mood created with a series of hard-edged and aggressive crescendos which batter the ears. Something considerably less aggressive would have done nicely.

Then there are the dances. The English, Cornish and Scottish are superb. But what happened to the Irish? The light-hearted mood of the earlier dances is dispelled entirely with music which seems not just contrasting, but entirely inappropriate with the genre. To a certain extent the symphonies also suffer from this incredible dichotomy of what I can only describe as too much light and too much shade.

But I suppose the man maketh the music and the man himself was

a character beset by demons – demons who seem to manifest themselves in the music. To me it seems a pity: if Arnold had been able to rein himself in a little more the result would have been tremendous. He freely admitted that he wrote much of his work in too much of a hurry and did not spend enough time in particular on the symphonies. It is then, I would suggest, the backward glance, the second check, the polishing up that would have made so much difference to the music. It might well have even transformed a good composer into a really great one.

I'm still unreservedly an Arnold Fan, and rate him more highly than many other British composers (Bax to the wall) but I'm also frustrated to think what might have been. Had Arnold's muse been tempered a little more; if his character had perhaps been a touch more pragmatic, in essence more stable, then things could have been different. But composers are, after all, only human. They cannot be composing machines and neither would we want them to be.

Rob Furneaux,
Devon, U.K.

THE STANFORD SOCIETY

Thank you very much for publishing the news item about the formation of the Stanford Society in the last edition of the RVW Journal. The Cambridge Weekend went extremely well with around 250 attending the Saturday evening concert in Trinity College Chapel and strong attendance at the other events. I believe that we got the Society off to a great start.

One problem that we have just run into is that the person who was to edit our Journal has recently had to withdraw because of a job change and pending relocation. I wonder if any RVW Society member, or anyone else reading this, might know of anyone who might be interested in taking on the role? We plan to start with two editions a year following a similar format to the RVW Journal.

Finally, I believe that there was a small typo in the piece about the Stanford Society in that my email address for Society correspondence was not mentioned. This is:
cvstanfordsociety@msn.com

John Covell,
Chicago, U.S.A.

Concert Reviews

THE 9TH IN SEATTLE

The Seattle Philharmonic Orchestra's conductor Adam Stern's article about his recent performance of the Ninth Symphony appears in this Journal. Society member Michael Zelensky was there...

I have often thought that the music of Vaughan Williams can be roughly divided into three categories: the religious; the pastoral; and the...well, let's just say that "raucous" (as with energetic use of the brass) does not begin to describe it, though the music does have a northern forest roll (woodwinds, strings), like that of Sibelius. To allude to more current musical phraseology, a good measure of Vaughan Williams' music just plain "kicks" royal "behind". At times, the man can literally out-Wagner Wagner and can often outwit Gershwin. The Sixth Symphony and *The Wasps* fit the bill here. So while the continentals are riding the Valkyries, one can turn to even Vaughan Williams' modest works and gaze down on Valhalla from the Cotswolds.

This brings us to the occasion last January 21st of the Seattle Philharmonic Orchestra's celebration of Vaughan Williams' 135th birthday in the box-like confines of Meany Hall at the University of Washington. The all-Vaughan Williams program contained *The Wasps*, the Magnificat, *the Running Set*, and Symphony No. 9 in E Minor. SPO conductor Adam Stern stated that with this selection, he was trying to strike a balance in Vaughan Williams' music. Personally, I'm glad he favored the third category above.

The Wasps offered us all five parts of the suite (not just the Overture as is standard repertoire). The second and fourth parts revealed their regal mode, with the other parts showcasing certain instruments, including the flute. *The Ballet and Final Tableau* was rollicking, like a good episode of Benny Hill. The orchestra was brought along with clarity at a brisk pace, and the Overture at its conclusion could not help but draw applause.

The Magnificat featured contralto Teresa S. Herold and the Northwest Boychoir. Herold's performance was velvety smooth yet firm. The choir evoked memories of *Flos Campi* and Holst's outer planets, distant yet near. The performances were seamless throughout this celestial piece. *The Running Set*, seeing recent popularity, is definitely a Category 3 (it also has a pastoral sonority). The variations and polyphony were ably handled by the orchestra.

Like paprika, it is hard to grasp the true flavor of the Ninth. It harkens to the more dour parts of past, lively symphonies – the *London*, in the fourth movement, or the Fourth Symphony, early movements – and its sense of modern times leaves us uneasy. There is an anxiety amidst the instruments' play, a world still not at peace. Maestro Stern explained that Vaughan Williams wanted his symphonies played faster, and was happy to oblige. The saxophones whisked in the Scherzo, strong cello and bass sections were tightly animated throughout, and the first movement was sufficiently earnest. Stern (who told us afterwards that his introduction to Vaughan Williams came through *Dona Nobis*

Pacem) played it to the brink, the symphony working in fits and starts, kicking and screaming toward an end. The Ninth's final minute recalls the Sixth's epilogue, as here the harps reflect a nervous sky. Will the sound barrier be broken today? Will air raid sirens blare? For this was the state of the world when Vaughan Williams left us in 1958.

The SPO and Maestro Stern presented an ambitious program with high production values. It is believed to be the premier of the Ninth in the Pacific Northwest. They deserve a wry nod for the good show.

Michael Zelensky
Ketchikan, Alaska

TALLIS AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS IN BROOKLYN

I was able to attend the April 21 concert of the Brooklyn Philharmonic at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which was guest-conducted by Stefan Asbury. The concert featured Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, the New York premiere of Julia Wolfe's *My Beautiful Scream*, and concluded with Holst's *The Planets*. Also on hand were members of the New York Virtuoso Singers, the Kronos Quartet, and the Women of Canticum Novum Singers. The Brooklyn Philharmonic is notable because it is made up of "freelancers" who are paid on a per-performance basis as opposed to being employed full-time. As such, the orchestra performs only a few single-night concerts a year, but it has gained a reputation for unconventional and daring performances and premiers of new music. Robert Spano, whom Society members might know for conducting the Grammy Award-winning version of Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, had been the Philharmonic's music director prior to its current director, Michael Christie.

The concert was billed to begin with the *Fantasia*, but audience members were first treated to a performance of Psalm 2 from Thomas Tallis' *Nine Tunes for Archbishop Parker's Psalter* by four members of the New York Virtuoso Singers. This was a pleasant surprise for me because I had never heard an original performance of the theme on which the *Fantasia* is based. I was also impressed with the staging of the Tallis work in that after the conductor appeared on stage to the applause of the audience, the stage lights were completely dimmed. The four singers then quietly came out from behind the stage, each holding a candle, and performed the Psalm. After a brief applause, the singers quietly exited, the lights were turned back up, and the actual fantasia began. The Philharmonic's string section is not as large as more prominent, standard professional orchestras, but this didn't matter because the work has such an intimate feel anyway. The smaller of the two string orchestras that the composer calls for was set entirely to the conductor's right, which helped visually to convey the back-and-forth nature of the piece, something that doesn't always come across when listening to a recording of it. This was the first time I witnessed a performance of the piece, so I don't know if this is typically how it's staged. Mr. Asbury clearly had a passionate feeling for the work and it resonated with the performers and the audience and made for an excellent start to the night.

Next came Julia Wolfe's *My Beautiful Scream*. This work was commissioned especially for the Kronos Quartet to perform with

the orchestra. The work was unique because the players of the quartet were connected to amplifiers so that they could be heard when the orchestra was playing loudly. The orchestration also called for an electronic bass guitar. The work had some high points, but it also seemed a bit minimalist at times, which doesn't always fit my tastes.

The final work was *The Planets*. In keeping with the unconventional nature of the evening, the performance featured film (digital and photographic) of the actual planets taken from various satellites and space probes. These were arranged to correspond to Holst's work by Hatch Productions. It was a nice extra bonus. In addition, a speaker would read some inspired literature and facts about either the planet, the Roman god it represents, and/or the astrological significance before each movement. This allowed the audience to clap at the end of each movement as opposed to having to wait until the end of the work. This would normally be considered a faux pas, but who hasn't wanted the chance to burst into applause at the end of *Jupiter*! The orchestra's size did take away a tad from the fullness one usually associates with the work: the strings did not quite "soar" all the way during *Mercury*, though they handled *Jupiter* nicely, and there was not quite the normal quantity of brass that the work calls for – only one tuba, for example. Another thing lacking was an organ. The celesta player would double on a synthesizer, which replicated the sound well for the higher registers of the organ but could not quite give the work that extra special kick for those menacing parts of *Mars* or *Uranus*. These shortcomings aside, the players and conductor were still able to capture the uniqueness of each movement with all the passion and discipline one would expect to put on a great performance and I was really impressed.

Back to Vaughan Williams: this was only the second performance of one of his works that I had been to, the other being his 5th Symphony with the Philadelphia Orchestra some years ago. What is heartening is the number of conversations I overheard during intermissions and after the concerts of different people talking about how moved they were and how much they really enjoyed Vaughan Williams' music (yes, I eavesdrop a bit!) In addition, many of the listeners at the Brooklyn Philharmonic's performance were college-aged kids and young professionals like me. There is clearly a wider audience out there waiting to be exposed to him. I know that we, his admirers, sometimes lament how infrequently his music is played by major professional ensembles, but I think Vaughan Williams would be touched at the growing number of smaller orchestras and amateur choirs that are performing his works and doing a good job of it.

Matthew Andaloro
Plainsboro, New Jersey, USA

DOWN WEST

Well m'dears – as we say down here in the West Country – I'm glad to report that the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams is alive and kicking. During the last week of April the Tavistock Music and Arts Festival took the theme of "The English Pastoral", and I'm pleased to say that Vaughan Williams was very well represented.

In the Gala Concert at St Eustacius Church on April 28 the programme included *Songs of Travel* and the *Tallis Fantasia*. This

was played by the Ten Tors Orchestra, an amateur group recently established who are going from strength to strength. In fact I would say that their playing was so good that it wouldn't have been possible to place the colloquial "fag paper" between them and the strings of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

The *Tallis Fantasia* was given a sumptuous and deliciously languidly paced performance under the baton of the Ten Tors' principal conductor Simon Ible. This was very well received. The concert also included the little known *Concertino Pastorale* by John Ireland – a gorgeous work which I highly recommend to you.

The *Songs of Travel* were sung by the young South African Baritone Njabulo Madala. He is at present studying with Robert Dean at the Guildhall School of Music. He gave a strong and spirited rendition of the songs, giving them considerable forward momentum, but also adding touches of gentleness – particularly in *The Roadside Fire*. In *The Vagabond* he was particularly assertive, indeed so much so that the "S" and "T" sounds in some of the words were so emphasised that he showered the people in the front row. I was surprised in fact that he didn't come armed with waterproofs and sou'westers to hand out to those close by.

Seriously though, it was an excellent performance, and the next day he went on to a lunchtime recital at nearby Kelly College where he gave a creditable rendition of *Linden Lea* as well as songs by Quilter and Ireland.

Interestingly, the *Songs of Travel* were played in the string arrangement which I had not heard of before. This, of course, was the work of Roy Douglas who completed the re-orchestration of these five most popular songs after Vaughan Williams' death.

So I look forward to more quality concert-going in the future. Indeed, the South West is now blessed with two additional ensembles: The Cornwall Sinfonia and the North Devon Sinfonia. Neither, I have to report, are yet on a par with the Ten Tors. Recently, I attended a Concert at the Landmark Theatre in Ilfracombe where the North Devon Sinfonia played Mozart, Bruch and – surprisingly – Nielsen's Symphony No. 2. Unfortunately the 2nd proved too much for them and they rapidly became ragged and traumatised – to the point where one of the cellos collapsed...but that's another story.

Rob Furneaux
Devon, UK

SINFONIA ANTARTICA IN SYDNEY

A performance of the *Sinfonia Antartica* remarkable for its melancholy potency was given in March 2007 by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Mills, who is one of Australia's leading composers and also a conductor of note. (His recent opera *Batavia* deals with the dreadful consequences of the shipwreck suffered by the flagship of the Dutch East-India fleet in 1606. A group of mutineers set up a vicious regime on an island off the West Australian coast where survivors manage to land,

only to face cannibalism by the mutineers and a loss of faith in God until, in a not wholly convincing ending, the mutineers are apprehended by soldiers from Java and hung.)

The performance of the *Sinfonia Antartica* had special significance for me because I attended its world premiere in January 1953 when the Halle Orchestra conducted by "Glorious John" Barbirolli played this starkly beautiful music in Manchester. A few months later I heard it again at what was presumably its London premiere, this time conducted by Malcolm Sargent. At the time I was working as an Australian scientist and stationed at an ICI establishment near Blackpool, and I well recall the necessary run from the Free Trade Hall in Manchester to the railway station in order to catch the last train back to Blackpool. It was a couple of years later that I became Australian Correspondent for the *Musical Times* (then a Novello publication) and continued as such until 1991, when MT was sold. Music criticism became a lifelong hobby, not as respectable perhaps as organic chemistry but certainly a wonderful counterpoint to science.

Back to the subject. The Sydney performance (actually it was done twice) had two special ingredients. One was readings by actor John Bell – one of this country's most influential theatre personalities and founder/director of the Bell Shakespeare Company – of passages from Robert Falcon Scott's eloquent diary between movements of the symphony, not merely those which Vaughan Williams specified, but far longer ones.

The other special ingredient was cinematic backdrops during the music of Herbert Ponting's original photographs taken on Scott's ill-fated expedition. Ponting (1870 - 1935) was one of numerous applicants for this job with Scott and took hundreds of black and white photos of the party heading southwards to the pole, then returning to New Zealand when the expedition had set out for its destination. His job had been immensely difficult, needing much special equipment (the lenses became covered with ice outside, and dripped with moisture when taken inside a hut) and he finally suffered a severe disappointment when he found, on returning to England, that Scott had made agreements with newspapers which prevented him from making a decent profit from those invaluable photos. No wonder that some of the many photos used in the Sydney performance were not top-notch technically; that they could be used at all was a wonder.

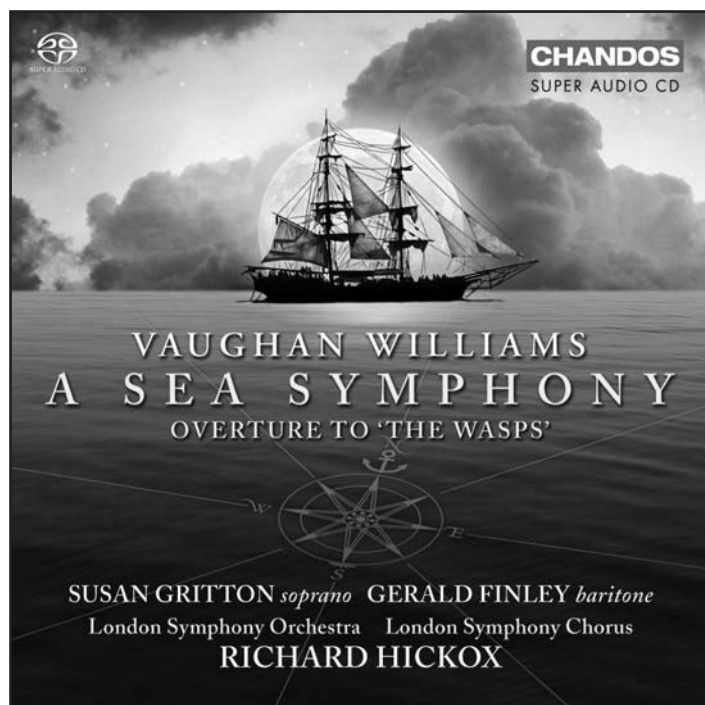
The *Antartica* is the only Vaughan Williams work listed for a SSO performance this year, but with some 5000 listeners at its two performances, it certainly made a profound impact. The work had previously been performed in Sydney three times: under Eugene Goossens at the NSW Conservatorium of Music (where Goossens was Director) in 1953, under Bernard Heinze in 1969, then by the visiting New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under James Judd for the Olympic Arts Festival in 2000.

Fred Blanks,
Greenwich, New South Wales,
Australia.

CD Review

A SEA SYMPHONY OVERTURE to THE WASPS

**Susan Gritton (soprano), Gerald Finley (baritone),
London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus conducted by
Richard Hickox. CHANDOS CHSA 5047**



Those members present at the Barbican Hall in London in early June 2006 will remember a vivid, exciting performance with

Richard Hickox and his two soloists also showing tenderness and nobility in that remarkable long last movement. Sadly, not all these qualities have transferred to CD in this “live” (but patched) recording. The vividness and excitement have been retained, but when in the live performance this seemed appropriate and spontaneous, here it sounds more contained. The spirit of this astonishing work only fitfully appears leaving fewer spine-tingling moments than is often the case.

The difficulty is more clearly heard in the fourth movement. The opening – “O vast rondure” – lacks, on repeated listening, a sense of mystery. The wonderful *largamente* passage is beautifully played but fails to inspire. The “True Son of God” passage is suitably weighty but “singing his songs” is too ponderous. The baritone entry at “O we can wait no longer” lacks that sense of ecstasy that is central to Vaughan Williams’ inspirations, a sense that can be almost overwhelming in the finest interpretations. The emotional core of the work – “Bathe me O God in thee” – similarly leaves me underwhelmed, despite lovely singing from Gerald Finley. Things improve with “Nameless, the fibre and the breath” – where the nobility and expressiveness are heart-warming.

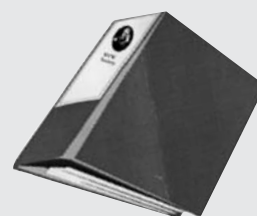
Turning to other recordings, the spine tingles afresh. Adrian Boult, in his HMV recording with John Carol Case and Sheila Armstrong, paces the fourth movement to perfection. Stick with Sir Adrian!

Stephen Connock

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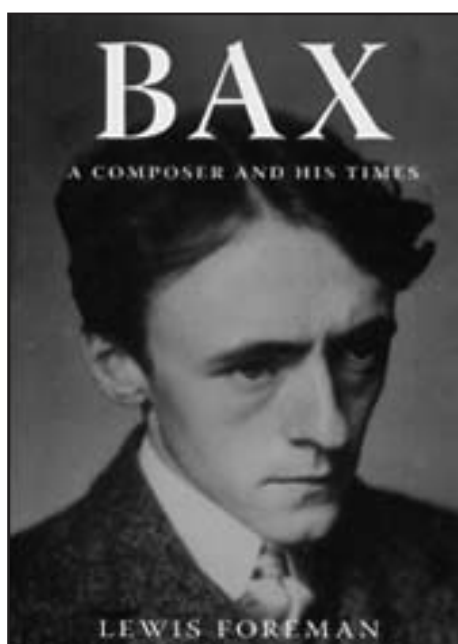
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Book Review

BAX - A COMPOSER AND HIS TIMES - LEWIS FOREMAN
(Boydell Press 2007)



At long last this masterly biography of a great composer has reappeared, now in a substantially augmented third edition. First published in 1983, the text has been expanded to incorporate some of the recently released correspondence between

Bax and his long time lover, Harriet Cohen, and which is quite explicit at times.

As the title suggests, this is not just a biography of a very remarkable man, but also a commentary on the extraordinary renaissance of serious composition that occurred in England (perhaps that should be Britain!) in the first half of the twentieth century.

His privileged upbringing and studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London are vividly described. The Irish/Celtic influences, adventures in Russia and Tintagel and the beginning of the long relationship with Harriet Cohen are explored in detail. Then follows that golden period between the wars, when Bax was arguably the finest symphonist in the country, and his friendship with the man who was eventually to create the greatest British symphonic cycle, Ralph Vaughan Williams. The relationship between these two composers makes fascinating reading. They were very close in the period 1926-31 when Bax was composing his 3rd Symphony and Vaughan Williams his Piano Concerto. The two works are linked in a rather mysterious way and of course Harriet was in on the "secret". Bax

appears in his letters to have been in awe of Vaughan Williams and of course was overwhelmed to receive the open dedication of the 4th Symphony. Perhaps this quote from Harriet gives an idea of their relationship. She recalled the three of them sitting together at Worcester in 1935 to hear *Sancta Civitas* and a choral piece by Bax: "VW had a quietening effect on our nervous friend, I noticed, as I sat pinned between them waiting to hear *The Morning Watch*."

Finally, Master of the King's Music, and the slow almost Sibelian decline in composition. Incredibly, this major composer lived out his last decade, more or less unnoticed, in a Sussex Pub, the White Horse at Storrington. He died in Ireland, his spiritual homeland.

This book is a model biography, highly informative, easy to read and referenced in great detail, essential reading not only for those interested in this composer but twentieth-century European music in general.

Robin Barber

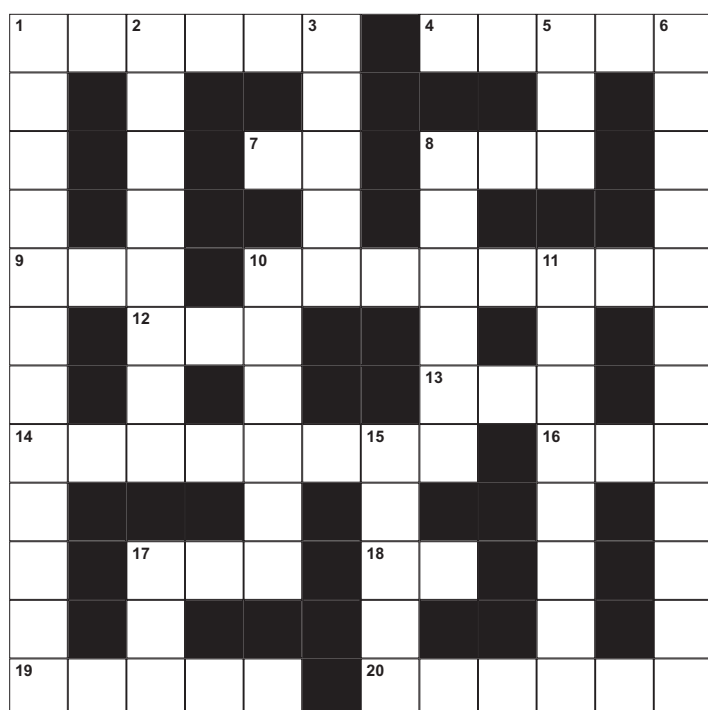
RVW, Email and the Internet

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



RVW Crossword No. 25 by Michael Gainsford**Across**

- 1&4 RVW's setting of Matthew Arnold (less the indefinite article) (6,5)
 7. Initials of the poet set in the sky above the roof
 8. Musical metrical unit divided by vertical lines. Mine's a pint! (3)
 9. Half (or third) of a latin American ballroom dance, sounds like just my cup of tea (3)
 10. Written in 1937 for the coronation (8)
 12. Send one if you'd like a reply! (1,1,1)
 13. Musical coda leads to this (3)
 14. Song written by RVW in 1899 (8)
 16. Colour of the barn in a folk song collected by RVW (3)
 17. Organ of sight (3)
 18. Initials of baritone at first performance of Hodie (1,1)
 19. RVW wrote two preludes for it in 1956 (5)
 20. John and Hugh did a bit more than this (6)

Down

1. Leon Goossens gave the first performance of this in 1944 (4,8)
 2. One of them is on Greensleeves, another on a theme of Tallis (8)
 3. Buonaparty's companion in the song from Hugh (5)
 5. You need at least one to listen to RVW's works (3)
 6. No 4 of the Songs of Travel (5,3,4)
 8. Antoine the Flemish composer of masses in the 15th & 16th centuries (6)
 10. Crispin, Friskin & Foxy were (6)
 11. No 5 of Songs of Travel (2,6)
 15. The number of the D minor symphony (5)
 17. One of these in the basket at the start of Norfolk Rhapsody No 1 (3)

Note: The crossword in issue 38 should have been numbered 24. Apologies for this error.

ANSWERS PAGE 18**Next Edition: October 2007***Riders to the Sea**Deadline for contributions**August 16 2007***Call for Papers**

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concentrate on RVW and the
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