

BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY

news

SEPTEMBER 2019

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Vice-Chairman**

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receives Empire
Medal*

 **British
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News

British Music Society's news and events

Chairman's welcome

It was good to meet so many of you at the 40th Anniversary Concert at St. John's Smith Square on June 22. Our congratulations and sincere thanks to the Ealing Symphony Orchestra and John Gibbons for making this a memorable event, and to Nicholas Keyworth and Michael Wilkinson from Revolution Arts who took the time to attend and introduce phase one of the new website.

As always, more up-to-date news can be found by subscribing to the BMS monthly E-news. The results of our essay competition winner and the BMS winners from the Young Talent Competition have just been announced in the September E-News (see reports), and the closing date will be announced shortly for the BMS's BASC 2019 masterclass/competition conducted by Roderick Williams; this is held jointly with our member Nigel Foster's London Song Festival and will take place on December 10 at the 1901 Arts Club, 7 Exton Street, Waterloo, London SE1 8UE.

Matthew Schellhorn has now completed the recording stage of Herbert Howells piano music for our next BMS release on Naxos. A morning recital at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester is planned by Matthew to launch this CD.

It involves some forward planning but we are exploring the possibility of holding the AGM after this recital over a private lunch as near as possible to the venue. If you are interested in attending, please keep the date of 31 July 2020 pencilled in your diaries.

- Dr. Wendy Hiscocks

Award for British Music Society Vice Chairman



John Gibbons, Vice-Chairman of the British Music Society and long-serving conductor and music director of symphony orchestras in Worthing, Ealing and Northampton, has been awarded a British Empire Medal in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours for services to music.

"I was quite overwhelmed to receive the news of the award - not in my wildest imagination had I ever imagined that such an honour would be bestowed upon me," exclaimed John. "I have always taken my own path in the musical world and programmed music, often unfamiliar, that I passionately believe in." An exemplary commitment to community music and young soloists John Gibbons has conducted most of the major orchestras in the UK and has been Principal Conductor of Worthing Symphony Orchestra - the professional orchestra of West Sussex - for the last 21 seasons; "a period of much evolution", he says, "as we bring music to people of all ages in the area."

Renowned for his support of young soloists at the start of their careers; guest artists have included winners from high-profile competitions such as the 'BBC Young Musician of the Year' and John regularly attracts performances from the likes of Nicola Benedetti, Sheku Kanneh-Mason and Jess Gillam. As a composer himself, John has commissioned new works from emerging composers including Laura Rossi, whose film score he conducted at a live screening of *The Battle of the Somme* with the BBC Concert Orchestra, for the centenary in the Royal

Festival Hall. Amongst a catalogue of recordings, John has recorded Bruckner's Symphony No. 9 with a completion of the Finale by Nors Josephson; the string concertos of Arthur Benjamin; four Mozart piano concertos with the Turkish pianist Idil Biret, and two discs of orchestral music by William Wordsworth, of which volume two is scheduled for release in August on Toccata Classics. Champion of British music As Vice-Chairman of the British Music Society (BMS) and a Trustee of the William Alwyn Foundation, John Gibbons has been a passionate advocate of neglected British music of the twentieth century.

"I joined the BMS as a life member as its promotion of neglected composers is a vital part of UK culture. I think there is now a greater awareness that there is much quality music by composers who are not household names and a greater willingness to give the music a chance."

"For me the real pleasure is introducing these significant works to an audience for whom they may be unfamiliar - and to international soloists who may go on to perform them worldwide."

As well as programming British works wherever he can, John has most recently championed symphony-cycles of George Lloyd and Malcolm Arnold with the Ealing Symphony Orchestra, and he is a regular advisor and performer at the Malcolm Arnold Festival, conducting the BBC Concert Orchestra for broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Former Journal editor Roger Carpenter dies

It is with regret that we have to inform members of the death, at the age of 82, of our member Roger Carpenter who lived in Tenby.

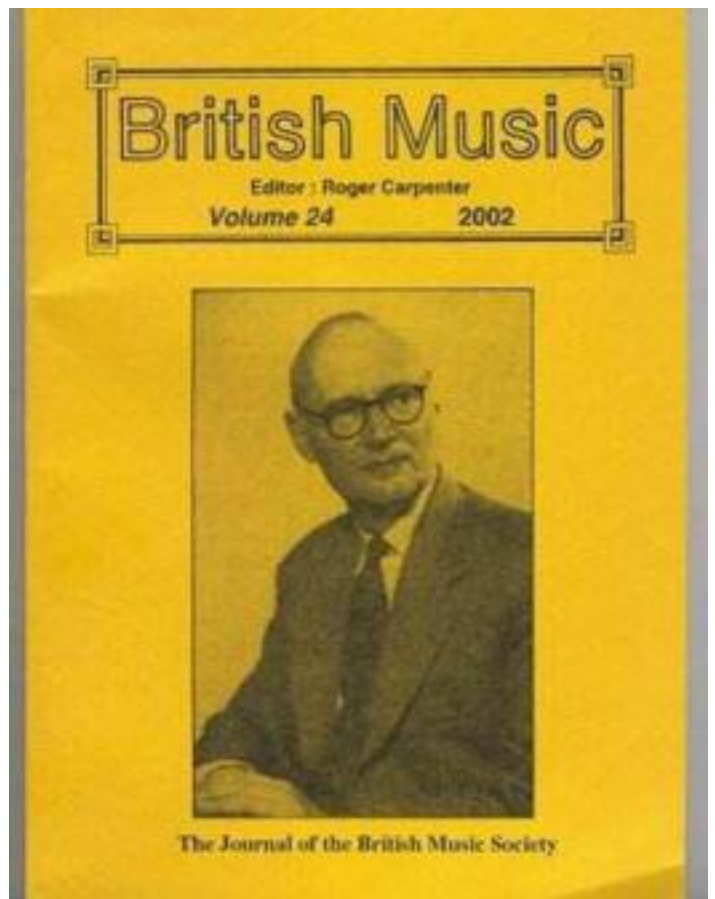
He was awarded the Berkeley Medal in 2009 for his services to the Society.

Some members may have met Roger at occasional past AGMs, as I did, or know him otherwise. Roger joined the Society in 1997 and in 2000 volunteered to edit our annual Journal, following the unexpected death of his predecessor Don Roberts.

He did this successfully until 2007 when he decided he should retire. Roger had published a biography of the composer William Baines in 1976, a much revised and extended edition of which he offered to the Society, who published this in 1997 (and which is still available), probably the principal publication on this composer.

Our condolences go out to his widow and family members on their loss.

- Stephen Trowell, Hon. Treasurer



Discovering the music of David Hackridge Johnson

This article is the first of a series exploring this British composer and his recorded works.

Until November last year I had never heard of David Hackridge Johnson. Then the happenstance of being in London at the same time of the premiere of his 9th Symphony by the Westminster Philharmonic, an amateur orchestra of extraordinary ability, was a revelation.

Where had a composer of this talent been all my life? Why was work of this quality being played in a church in Waterloo and not at the neighbouring Royal Festival Hall?

The composer was born in 1963 and graduated from the Guildhall school of Music and Drama and then pursued the life of a professional violinist and music teacher. Recently he completed a PhD in experimental music which included writing and performing an opera in the Star Trek language Klingon! Alongside this he wrote music; lots of it.

At the present time he has written almost 400 works with opus numbers including 17 symphonies. He seems to have put time and energy into writing large



orchestral works without any hope of them being performed but of a need to get the notes down on paper (shades of Brian?), and we should be glad he did. Martin Anderson of Toccata Classics has likewise invested a great deal of time energy and effort into bring this music to the public and for that we should be grateful.

His orchestral writing seems completely natural, the brilliance of his writing for the brass, the horns in particular, is extraordinary, I have heard nothing like it since some of the wilder passages of Tippett.

Mr Johnson seems to have completely absorbed the music of composers such as Alwyn, Arnold, Brian, Tippett and Simpson with a splash of international composers such as Shostakovich and Sibelius and the Americans Barber, Diamond, Harris and Hanson. That is not to say the work is derivative, it is not; he has absorbed their styles and filtered out what he needs to express himself. He has developed in isolation a thoroughly developed symphonic voice that is unlike any other composers currently writing. - Paul RW Jackson

British Music Society Committee

Wendy Hiscocks (Chairman), John Gibbons (Vice Chairman), Stephen Trowell (Treasurer), Dominic Daula (Journal Editor), Advisory role: Karen Fletcher

Printed News designed by Revolution Arts

British Art-Song Competition 2019

The London Song Festival and the British Music Society are collaborating again this year to hold the British Art-Song Competition, which, as in previous years, will be part of the London Song Festival British Song Masterclass.

This year the masterclass will be open to voice and piano duos aged 32 and under, and will be given by Roderick Williams OBE (*pictured right*).

Roderic who will select the best duo to be awarded the 2019 British Art Song Competition prize of £800 (kindly donated by the British Music Society) and the winning duo will also be offered a recital in the 2020 London Song Festival.

Duos must be age 32 or under, and will be required to present two songs in English, at least one of which must be a setting of words by Walt Whitman.

Application forms are available on www.londonsongfestival.org. The audition date will be announced nearer the time.

The masterclass and competition will take place at the 1901 Arts Club 7 Exton Street, Waterloo, London SE1 8UE on Tuesday 10 December 2019 in two sessions beginning at 2pm and 6pm.

Ten duos will be selected at the auditions, and there will be a charge of £40 for each selected duo.



The Swing of the Pendulum

The George Lloyd Society is pleased to announce the publication of an extended article about the English composer George Lloyd by musicologist and concert programmer Peter Davison.

Mr Davison examines the composer's life and work in unprecedented depth in *The Swing of the Pendulum: George Lloyd and the Crisis of Romanticism*.



In other news about George Lloyd, a violin purchased for the composer has been discovered in Kendal, Cumbria.

The violin made by John Betts in London around 1800) is believed to have belonged Lady Emma Hamilton. According to a letter which came with the violin, it passed through the family of Lady Hamilton's butler, John Jefferies, who were shopkeepers in Brighton.

The instrument was purchased for George Lloyd (1913-1998) when he was taken on as a pupil by violinist Albert Sammons at the age of 16 in 1929.

Holst Society Christmas CD

We are planning to record, this summer, all Holst's Christmas music for release in October.

This CD will include a number of Christmas works not previously recorded.

Furthermore, for the first time, we will be bringing all Holst's Christmas music together on one disc. The music will be recorded by the Godwine Choir.

Secondly, this will be the first recording of all five works by Holst for organ, including a recent transcription.

The four voluntaries dating from the early 1890s will be featured, together with a transcription by Richard Brasier of Holst's last orchestral work, a scherzo, for organ (four hands).

The Scherzo, completed shortly before Holst's death in 1934, was intended to be a movement of his planned second orchestral symphony. He never started work on the other movements. Richard's arrangement of the Scherzo (dating from 2015), an allegro, is an exciting, virtuosic piece and which will also be played by



Jonathan Hope and Christopher Too at the conclusion of choral evensong on Tuesday 30 July 2019 at Gloucester Cathedral, during the Three Choirs Festival.

The five organ pieces will also be recorded at Gloucester Cathedral. The soloists will be Richard Brasier, Tom Bell and John Wright.

The recording (under the EM label) is likely to cost the Society well in excess of

£6000. Members of the BMS will, hopefully, wish to support the Society, financially, in this exciting project. Contributions in excess of £50 will guarantee a free CD of the recording.

*** Please email Chris Cope, chairman of the Holst Society:** chairman@holstsociety.org

BMS ESSAY COMPETITION WINNER 2019

Dominic Duala, internal adjudicator, is delighted to announce Matthew McCullough (Durham University) as winner of the BMS Fortieth Anniversary Essay Competition.

His essay, titled *A history and analysis of Gerald Finzi's Dies Natalis*, will be published in a forthcoming edition of British Music. In addition, he was awarded a generously donated prize of £100.

Dominic would also like to thank Dr Brian Inglis (Middlesex University) for acting as external adjudicator.

Matthew McCullough was born in Ireland and studied at St Malachy's College, Belfast, before taking up a music scholarship to study at Winchester College for sixth form, where, with the College Chapel Choir, he toured Russia and recorded a disc of music by C.V. Stanford.

After the brief spell at Winchester, Matthew sang as a choral scholar



in Portsmouth Cathedral Choir alongside roles working at The Portsmouth Grammar School and the city's arts festival, Portsmouth Festivities.

In 2016, Matthew took up a place to read music at Durham University on a Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship, with a Choral Scholarship at Durham

Cathedral. During his time as an undergraduate, he was Director of Music at Hatfield College and the Dunelm Consort and Players, and sang with the University Chamber Choir.

Matthew also undertook other freelance singing, accompanying, and conducting work, which has been aided by his position as one of Sing for Pleasure's 2018/19 Young Conducting Scholars.

He graduated in July 2019 with First Class Honours, including a first for his dissertation, *Requiem for a Dream*; Sir Arthur Bliss' *Morning Heroes* as a Cathartic Requiem, supervised by Professor Jeremy Dibble.

At present, Matthew sings as a Lay Clerk at Newcastle Cathedral and is studying for a Masters in Musicology at Durham, with research focusing on the work of Ernest John Moeran.

He hopes to continue on to doctoral studies following the completion of his Master's degree.

Inbox

*Send your letters to the Chairman to chairman@britishmusicsociety.com
or write to 178 Alexandra Road, Muswell Hill, London, N10 2ES*

The Woman of Samaria

Dear Chairman,

I was pleased to see C. B. Rootham have a mention in the latest BMS News. And the fact that a CD of Sterndale Bennett's music was reviewed therein reminded me that last month, as part of a weekend series of mainly short concerts in Sheffield was a performance of Bennett's Biblical oratorio *The Woman of Samaria* (1869) by the appropriately named Sterndale Singers.

In my series of lunch-hour concerts in Doncaster we have had performances of his piano music, some of the chamber music and some songs, but my only acquaintance with *The Woman of Samaria* previous to this was of the chorus 'God is a Spirit' which was on a miscellaneous LP I once had of British sacred music.

This Sheffield performance, lasting only 35 minutes, was of course abridged from the original 1¼ hours; about three quarters of the work's choruses were done and most of the bass solos given to Christ.

The other two soloists, a mezzo-soprano 'Evangelist' and the soprano Woman, were abridged by their words being spoken. The choruses, apart from maybe 'God is a Spirit', sounded very Mendelssohnian, perhaps the sort of invention Mendelssohn might have composed on a slightly off day.

I asked the conductor of the Sterndale Singers if he knew when the last previous

performance of *The Woman of Samaria* had taken place, and he replied not since the 1870s. The Sterndale Singers hope to do a complete performance with orchestra. I wish them well in that, but if not, perhaps they may tackle an abridgement of Bennett's secular cantata *The May Queen*.

Meanwhile I enjoyed their reading of the *Woman*, truncated though it was.

- PHILIP L. SCOWCROFT

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Dear Chairman,

I have always been interested in the music of Elisabeth Lutyens. I find it difficult to listen to, but her position in the recent history of our music seems to make it worth persevering.

The recorded repertoire is reasonably big, but it misses the stage works. I have off-air recordings of her *Linnet* and the *Leaf*, and *Isis* and *Osiris*, but since neither caught on they give an unbalanced view. Her greatest stage success was, I think, *Time off?* Not a *Ghost of a Chance*. I would very much like to hear it. It was broadcast twice, in 1972 and again the following year (different performances). The British Library has a recording, but getting in there in order to listen to it is a daunting task.

Is there a member who has an off-air

recording that they would be willing to share with me? I do hope so.

- DOUGLAS BENNETT
dmbennett616@gmail.com

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Dear Chairman,

It was a great honour for the ESO to be invited to play for the 40th anniversary of the BMS. Thank you so much to everyone involved. I hope we played that marvellous programme well enough to justify your confidence in us.

I enclose the promised copy of the recording for your archives, with our compliments. Our professional extra players have given their consent on the basis that it will be made available only to participants and other members of the ESO and BMS (and not put on the internet).

If any of BMS members would like their own copies they can order from me on the same terms as our players, namely £10 per pair of CDs. I'll give the proceeds after costs to the BMS.

Please send a cheque to R K Partridge, at 68 Elers Road, Ealing, London W13 9QD. For any queries, please call 020 8567 4075.

- R.K. PARTRIDGE (Hon. Secretary,
Ealing Symphony Orchestra)

Welcome to our new members

A warm welcome to the following new members to the Society:

Paul Henley (Shropshire)
Catharine Perry (London)
A Heward Rees (Llanelli)
David A. Reeve (Derbyshire)
Mark Underwood (Kent)
William Vann (London)
Adrian Williams (Herefordshire)

Join the British Music Society

If you are not already a member, you can join us for as little as £25 per year (free if you are under 25). Members benefit from:

- regular e-newsletters
 - discounts on all BMS CDs and publications
 - a network of British music enthusiasts.
- Join online at the BWS website.

Concert listings available online



Visit the BMS website for the latest concert listings featuring British Music at www.britishmusicsociety.com/events

2019 AGM report

A report on the British Music Society AGM



The British Music Society held its annual general meeting on Saturday 22 June at St John's Smith Square.

Chairman Wendy Hiscocks presented the following items to the members present.

BMS Journal: Two editions have been published; Volumes 39:2 and 40:1 were released as a double issue towards the end of 2018. Volume 40:2 was released in the first quarter of 2019.

Volumes 41:1 and 2 will be released later this year featuring some historic articles dating from the early editions of the publication.

Essay competition: This has attracted some interest from undergraduate and postgraduate students affiliated with British institutions. The deadline has been extended to 14 July, and the adjudicator is a Senior Lecturer in Music at Middlesex University.

Recordings: The Villiers Quartet recordings of William Sterndale Bennett Quartets was released on Naxos in the autumn of 2018. The latest BMS NAXOS recording of Grace Williams's chamber music was launched at City University on the 1st March.

It was the culmination of a major project directed by Madeleine Mitchell, Violinist and Director of the London Chamber Ensemble. The CD features all world premiere recordings of Grace Williams's chamber music spanning 40 years:

Violin Sonata (1930, rev 1938)
Sextet for Oboe, Trumpet, Violin, Viola, Cello, Piano (1931)
Suite for Nine Instruments (1934)
Romanza for Oboe and Clarinet (1940s)
Sarabande for Piano Left Hand (1958)
Rondo for Dancing for Two Violins and Optional Cello (1970)

The recording was made possible by additional funding from the RVW and Ambache Trusts and with support in kind for the recordings from Ty Cerdd and City University.

Mitchell's CD of Grace Williams's chamber music shot to number two position in the Official Specialised Classical Charts and number seven in the Official Classical Artist Albums Chart top 50 in mid-March.

Pianist Matthew Schellhorn plans a recording of his proposed world premiere recording of Howells's piano music in August 2019 with funding from the Howells Trust and the BMS. Further details to be announced soon.

Review panel: Geoffrey Atkinson continues to do an excellent job co-ordinating the review panel. The Society would like to encourage its members to also review concerts and to take the time to conduct interviews with people who have worked in interesting areas of the music industry involving British composers. These are priceless memories and information which will otherwise be lost.

Website: Concerns regarding the website function and capacity have resulted in the committee engaging Revolution Arts to build and maintain a new BMS website. The first stage of this project was ready for viewing at the 40th Anniversary concert on 22 June

2019 with Nicholas Keyworth and Michael Wilkinson present to introduce and discuss the website's capabilities.

Member communications: Revolution Arts continues to do a splendid job on the monthly E-news despatched reliably on the 1st of every month. It is now substantial in length which will be addressed later this year with two separate newsletters each month.

In addition, Revolution Arts produces a beautifully presented 20-page Printed News every four months. This is a compilation of selected items from previous E-News.

Back copies are available to members attending an AGM for no charge or to the general public at £1 each. Pdfs of previous issues are posted on the BMS website.



British International Youth Music Festival and Competition 2019



BMS chairman Wendy Hiscocks and treasurer Stephen Trowell travelled to Harrow School in Middlesex on 10 August for a very well attended prize giving ceremony in the impressive surroundings of the Old Speech Room.

The Chinese violinist, Amy Yuan, has succeeded in creating a vibrant competition for musicians as young as four years of age to budding professionals in their early twenties, and the mix of Asian and Western competitors looked balanced.

Music by W.H. Squire, Frank Bridge and Ralph Vaughan Williams had been performed in the competition alongside standard repertoire by the likes of Mozart and Rachmaninoff.

The BMS's initiative encouraged a further five performances of our nominated Dunhill piano solo Sailor's Hornpipe and one interpretation of Stanford's Arietta Variations for violin and piano. There were no takers at all for the Bantock song 'Desolation' which was disappointing.

The Society extends its sincere congratulations to our two winners appearing in the photo: Naori Takahashi (violin) and HanYang Liu (piano) who were presented with a copy of our Composer Profiles publication, a BMS CD and a £30 Chimes voucher.

Naori Takahashi is currently a scholarship postgraduate student at the Royal Academy of Music, studying violin performance under Professor György Pauk.

This season she has upcoming concerts at Regent Hall, Southwark Cathedral and at the Notting Hill Music Festival, as well as regular appearances on stage at the Royal Academy of Music playing solo, chamber and orchestral concerts. She is a selected member of the LPO Foyle Future Firsts Scheme 2019-2020.

HanYang Liu is a young Chinese pianist who started learning the piano at the age of three. He studied with professor Chen Lan, and is now studying with London based Chinese concert pianist Yaoying Wang. HanYang will be moving to London to study in the Harrow School as a music scholar this autumn and has been awarded 2nd prize at the International Chinese Music Art Festival global final in 2018 and first prize at the Golden Vienna International Piano Competition in 2017.

British Music Radio relaunches

British Music Radio, an online, play-on-demand radio project dedicated to exploring classical music whose composers were born or lived in the British Isles, has relaunched by founder Jan Cosgrove.

The station features an introductory series of four programmes including a magazine programme called The Journey.

BMR Live features world-famous pianist, Mark Bebbington with The Coull Quartet in a marvellous recital recorded in Chichester and featuring Ireland, Venables and Elgar. The Symphony, the first in a series, features Vaughan Williams 9th Symphony and finally Last Night ... of the Proms features a recording from 1963.





Gurney Hall

BRITISH COMPOSERS AT BATH SPA UNIVERSITY

It was encouraging to see a wide range of music by British Composers featured in Bath Spa University's Gala Concert on 21 April.

Bath's sumptuous Assembly Rooms arose as a post-war Phoenix from the ashes of the Bath Blitz. Now in the care of the National Trust, it's five great glittering chandeliers looked down on a hugely enjoyable evening of music performed by orchestras, symphonic wind bands, chamber choirs and jazz bands with some impressive soloists too.

But even this venue was not grand enough for the pomp and circumstance opening with William Walton's *Crown Imperial*. Originally composed for the coronation of King Edward VIII, his abdication meant it was performed at the coronation of his brother, King George VI, instead.

While some of the detail was lost in this arrangement for Symphonic wind band, there was a surreal depth of colour

from the serried ranks of clarinets and saxophones which brilliantly captured the spirit of its age.

In Malcolm Arnold's punchy *Sonatina* for Clarinet and Wind Band soloist John Gordon brought wit and joviality to this performance – right down to his gleaming patent leather spats!

Bob Chilcot's 'And so it goes' was beautifully presented by the University Chamber Choir with crisp diction and warmly blended voices directed by Francis Faux – well suited to the acoustic of the surrounding classical grandeur.

Tom Higgins's arrangement of the Arthur Pryor's 'Blue Bells of Scotland' for trombone and orchestra was one of the most ridiculous pieces I have heard in a while – and I loved it – the grins on the audience's faces clearly showing that larger than life soloist Reuben Jenkins has got under the skin of this work.

Conductor Tobias Lazenbury ensured that 'Mars' from Holst's *The Planets Suite* was both deafening and terrifying – as it should be – heralding in an unknown future world for many of the students for whom this was their final performance with this innovative and forward-looking university.

– NICHOLAS KEYWORTH

GURNEY HALL

Eighty years since the death of Ivor Gurney in Dartford Asylum his name is now remembered in the splendid acoustics of the renovated hall at his old school in Gloucester. The magnificent framework of the ancient wood-beams of the roof are delightfully painted in a variety of subtle colours.

Tim Kendall's talk 'The Comedy of War', was illustrated with Gurney's newly discovered poem, *La Rime*, to be published as part of a huge 5-volume edition from OUP. Comparing it with one of Sassoon's black-humoured ones, *Blighters*, Kendall explaining that humour was a kind of nervous, protective shield against the horrors of the Great War.

An early Elgar salon piece, *Idylle*, was played by the Divertimento String Quartet. They were joined by Australian baritone, Michael Lampard for the rarely heard song-cycle by George Butterworth. Lampard's big voice sometimes overpowered the quartet, but the catchy melody of the final song, *On the way to Kew*, brought the performers nicely into balance.

Gurney's *Molto Allegro* in F for quartet had been praised by Gerald Finzi and Divertimento gave a good performance, though I feel it needs more articulation and power in the musical sentences to give it more of a scherzo quality.

Four of Venables own songs starting with a setting of John Drinkwater's elegy for Elgar where the soft strings suited the poem nicely. Gurney's own *Pain* presented a bigger challenge for the quartet, which was a little underpowered.

Of the 12 quartets written in the asylum after 1922, only two have survived. One is a single movement, *A London Meditation*, the other a 4 movement work in D minor. Until quite recently, the general verdict was that Gurney was not capable of writing coherent music after 1922, but several such pieces have now been performed, showing that misguided prejudice to be nonsense!

– RICHARD CARDER

BMS celebrates r



The night of Saturday 22 June 2019 was indeed a special occasion and John Gibbons with the Ealing Symphony Orchestra gave us a wonderful event to mark the Society's 40th Anniversary.

There was plenty of variety in the programme presented by John, from the lyricism of the Michael Hurd to the lush sonorities of the Hamilton Harty and the striking sounds of Bax's Symphony no. 1.

We were particularly grateful to the Berlin-based New Zealand-Scottish soprano Kirstina Sharpin who stepped in to learn Harty's Ode to a Nightingale from scratch at thirty-six hours notice when Helena Dix fell ill.

This was quite a feat and even more remarkable when Kirstina told me at the interval that she did not have perfect pitch

but was able to remember music quickly. Nobody would have known the pressure she was under as she performed beautifully with admirable composure.

The photographs tell you the rest of the story. Three Chairmen past and present cut the cake – a delicious chocolate hazelnut sponge downed with a glass of wine and everybody entered into the spirit of the occasion. If only more of you could have been there to celebrate with us!

Richard Partridge has informed us that recordings of the concert are available by emailing him at secretary@ealingso.org.uk

– DR WENDY HISCOCKS



ruby anniversary



Howard Skempton: Conversations and reflections on music

Esther Cavett
Boydell Press
£45

“...what is this rubbish” (p.174), the conductor, James Weeks thoughts on first encountering a score by Howard Skempton are not unusual. The composer’s works are music stripped to the bare essentials and the often-unbarred lines of notes look almost childlike in their simplicity. But then one plays them, and one hears that this is music by a skilled composer with something to say and the means and burning confidence to be able to express them as simply as he wishes. He does not hide behind complex harmonies and mathematical rhythmical structures; the music is immediately communicative.

I first encountered Skempton’s work in the form of his ‘Snow Piece’ which was printed on half a page in Michael Nyman’s ground-breaking book ‘Experimental Music’ (1974). The work for piano has no bar lines as is notated in breves and plays pianissimo throughout.

There is nothing on the page to indicate that in performance it will create an atmosphere of terror and mystery, but this it does.

Howard Skempton has been part of British musical life for more than fifty years, as composer, performer and commentator. He studied in London with Cornelius Cardew in the late 1960s, co-founding the Scratch Orchestra. He has written over 600 pieces, often tiny works of only a few notes, which like Webern, a composer he loves, contain more import than seems possible.

Edited by Esther Cavett and Matthew Head from Kings College, London the book offers an insight into the composer’s creative world and how others may interpret it. It is not however a conventional biography though it contains a timeline, authorised work list and discography.

The publishers feel it is written for anyone interested in contemporary music but having lived with it for a couple

of months I think it is more suited to the professional musician or academic. The first four chapters comprise transcripts of conversations between Skempton and Esther Cavett, followed by reflections by noted academics on aspects of the music. The conversations are often quite dense and sadly rather dull. We get an overview of his early life and unorthodox training and an insight into his love of contemporary art from de Kooning to Kenneth Martin.

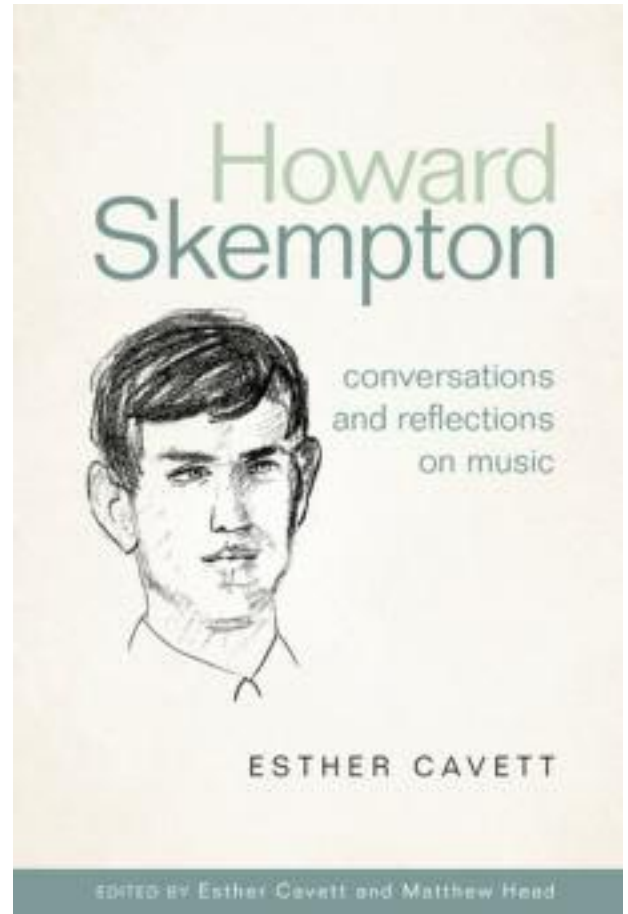
The composers who have influenced him, Cardew, Cage, Feldman, Webern, are not surprising, though his admiration for Britten is, perhaps. From Britten he seems to have taken the idea of a composer being useful to society and so his music unlike much of those composers he admires is approachable and not hidden behind a fence of aural thorns.

The reflections from different commentators; Matthew Head, Heather Wiebe, Arnold Whittall and Pwyll Ap Sion, feel as though they were taken from PhD submissions and are not for the faint hearted.

Whittall’s is the most coldly academic, his discussion of hexachords and none-triadic progressions reduces the music to dry theory which seems to be the antithesis of Skempton’s art.

Although in this Skempton is also at fault and his analysis of his ‘Snow Piece’ mentioned above takes more space in text than the work does in notation and in the end adds nothing to the worth of the music.

Sections on how he teaches composition and the response of some of his students are intriguing; he is a nice man, not like that brute Nadia Boulanger. The penultimate chapter is the most humane as it draws upon the voices of performers with long associations with the music; Peter Hill, Thalia Myers, John Tilbury and James Weeks. Here, finally, we get approachable comments on what it means to



play and communicate the works.

To end, Dr Cavett reflects on how Skempton told his story and the process of describing a creative life in music and we return sadly to the world of academe. Midway through the book (p.129) Dr Cavett reminisces about being taught composition by Nicola Le Fanu who said, ‘don’t intellectualize it too much’, if only that advice had been followed through here, a book more representative of the music may have been produced.

– PAUL RW JACKSON

Panufnik

Complete works for cello and piano
Ruth Henley *cello*
Ilya Chetverikov *piano*
Bridges Music BMCD01

The intoxicating tonal world of prolific 20th century composer, Andrzej Panufnik (1914–1991) began when, as a precocious and inquiring child, he pressed an ear against a wooden telegraph pole: "I was on holiday at the age of seven or eight and made the enthralling discovery that I could hear curious, magical sounds made by wires vibrating in the wind ..."

It seemed to me that I was listening to real music,' he says in his auto-biography. And that 'real music' was destined to develop into the distinctive Panufnik musical style which, over the decades, won this adopted British composer well-deserved international acclaim.

A turbulent life saw the Polish-born musician ultimately defy the ravages of World War II, defecting to become a British citizen in 1954 and going on to conceive many exceptional masterpieces, like the glorious *Sinfonia Sacra* (1963), the highly expressive *Katyn Epitaph* (1969), or the emotive, *Autumn Music* (1965). Many other impressive artistic achievements also proliferated from his pen.

But Andrzej Panufnik, one-time Music Director of the celebrated Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and great friend of fellow-Pole, Witold Lutoslawski, never forgot that childhood telegraph-pole magic.

This excellent release, featuring intensive performances of his three string quartets, is well worth a listen. It is also an historic reminder of those enigmatic sounds that originally fired his fertile imagination. Indeed, the second quartet, aptly entitled 'Messages', clearly demonstrates Panufnik's original childhood inspiration.

The recording includes a wonderful tribute to a fellow Polish composer – the well-loved Frederick Chopin. In *Suite Polska* the dexterous playing of Dory Ombodi (flute) and Slawomir (bass) intensify the vibrant expression.

Here we are privileged to hear some adept bow and finger-work – rang-

ing from bold forte to hauntingly sweet pianissimo passages. It convincingly enshrines that irrepressible Panufnik musical talent. Spacious acoustics enable an appropriate other-worldly, almost ethereal, seductive sound.

Exceptional warmth and subtly-balanced textures truly capture the misty-eyed roots of a composer reflecting over his eventful life.

These are late works, written when Panufnik was in his 60s and 70s. They were delicately scored for modest chamber forces but have all the dramatic power of a full orchestra.

– CHRIS BYE

Elgar

String Quartet and Piano Quintet
Brotsky Quartet
Martin Roscoe *piano*
Chandos CHAN10980



Behind the widespread pomp and nationalistic tub-thumping that boosted the popularisation of Britain's beloved Edward Elgar, there lies a compassionate and sensitive composer.

This superbly poised performance of Elgarian chamber music convincingly illustrates that point. This very timely release, which anticipates this year's rowdy Proms Last Night jamboree, certainly proves to those 'The Land-of-Hope-and-Glory' fanatics that there is a far deeper, melancholic side to their favourite British composer.

Since those jingoistic Edwardian years, the enthusiastic taste for one of

Britain's most-loved musical sons has positively widened, well beyond that initial front-facing nationalistic fervour. The much-celebrated Brodsky Quartet links with experienced pianist, Martin Roscoe, to give a moving and tender rendition of a Piano Quintet bursting with typical melodic richness.

The recording venue – in Potton Hall, Dunwich, Suffolk on the Channel coastline – couldn't be more apposite. For, in this very area during the First World War, the boom of cannon barrages could be heard in nearby war-torn France. This violent and chilling noise is menacingly mimicked by Elgar in a dramatic Quintet opening movement. A following andante literally bleeds with sympathetic despair.

The players wring every last ounce of emotion from a poignant adagio movement. A contemplative and soulful mood is dominated by an all-pervasive air of abject despair. This is a powerful performance that easily equals the much-treasured words of those WWI literary giants Sassoon, Owen and Brooke. Health problems for Elgar and his wife, Alice, added to the gloom.

The Quartet (Op. 83) also has its moody touches, particularly in an andante which is handled with delicacy in some beautifully phrased bow and string work.

The Brodsky players fire up well with in an opening Allegro molto, which leads to a satisfying Finale. Finely executed co-ordination brings the Quartet to a robust and triumphant ending which most Elgarian Prommers are bound to love.

– CHRIS BYE

Peter Racine Fricker

Organ Music
Tom Winpenny *organ*
TOCCATA Tocc 0518

You could say this is a disc for people who do not like modern organ music, as it is quite superb and might make a few converts. Peter Racine Fricker (1920–1990) was a well-known name in the 1950s and 60s being fluent in most genres except staged operas, with exposure in the concert hall and on radio.

The style is basically tonal-dissonant, sometimes with modified serial procedures. However, this apparently was not good enough for the new 1960's thugs and coincident with his accepting of an academic post in America, his music disappeared almost completely from view.

The booklet notes highlight his well-wrought, largely contrapuntal style, and fastidious textural clarity, all of which go hand-in-hand with music for organ – of which instrument he was an expert exponent.

I use the word 'superb' above with considerable emphasis. Firstly, there is exceptionally able playing from Tom Winpenny, which is dazzlingly clear and accurate. Then there is the very fine 75 stop monster organ in Bridlington Priory, said to be the biggest in a parish church in England, and an organ which boasts a gargantuan 32 foot Contra Tuba (which certainly rattled the foundations of this house).

Finally, there is the helpful acoustic, sensitively recorded. Too often in discs of organ music the sound comes over as mushy and indistinct obscuring details of the music. Given the importance of counterpoint in PRF's oeuvre this is a most important consideration.

There are stylistic nods in the direction of Hindemith and when he lets rip one is reminded of the extravagances of Messiaen and Langlais, but all the while he is his own man. I expect that only true devotees will listen to the whole disc in one sitting. I suggest you first put 'a toe in the water' by listening to the exquisite 'Pastorale' which is probably PRF's best known organ work, frequently appearing in recitals.

I have to admit I could not forbear from downloading it from the publisher Schott's website (at reasonable cost).

Tom W's exquisite performance made me want to explore the piece for myself.

Then try the 'Toccata Gladius Domini', a 'fiery extrovert work' which to quote Gillian Weir (who gave the British premiere in the RFH) shows that Fricker 'loved the organ with its power and capacity to thrill.'

– GEOFFREY ATKINSON

Howells

Chamber Music
String Quartet No. 3 / Lady Audrey's Suite
/ Piano Quartet
Dante Quartet
Gould Piano Trio
Benjamin Frith *piano*
NAXOS 8.573913

Imagine the meaning to an 18-year-old budding musician being in the audience at Three Choirs, Gloucester 1910 not only witnessing the premiere of RVW's Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis but also having RVW, himself, sitting next to you for the remaining portion of the programme. Throughout many works of Howells' total oeuvre one senses an overlay of RVW spirit and in some passages similar harmonic structures and major chords at cadences following modal exploration. All of this is to say, this Naxos disc presents several of these characteristics in the chamber music medium outside sacred choral or larger orchestral settings. There are passages in all three of these gems featuring string instruments of poignancy, of pastoral atmosphere juxtaposed with those of excitement and daring (in particular the final movement of the Op. 21 Piano Quartet).

Howells' use of the counterpoint we often hear in the sacred choral works is also well-represented here. As a pupil of Stanford, Parry, and Wood at the RCM one will no doubt sense reflection of their styles here and there.

The third movement of the String Quartet No. 3 (even more than the first movement to me) is so movingly beautiful with its folk-like melody, woven with plenty of time to enjoy the Gloucestershire countryside it paints.

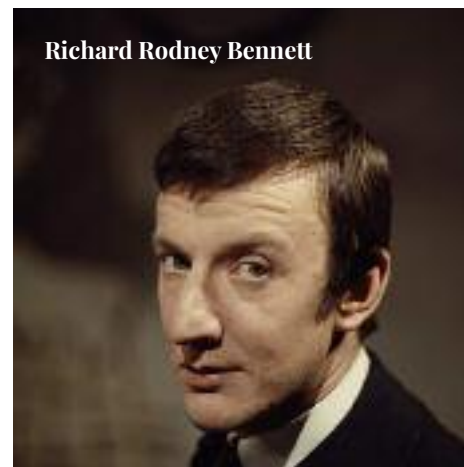
On the opposite end of the atmospheric imagery on the disc is the finale to the Piano Quartet: brilliantly showcasing more varied rhythmic interest throughout, fast-moving lines, and a fine featuring of the added piano timbre against the more lyric writing we hear in the other two works on this disc.

The String Quartet No. 3 was given its first performance in 1920 at Marion Scott's home in London; the Lady Audrey Suite, with its programmatic set of 4 character-piece movements, was a present for Scott's niece; the Piano Quartet was dedicated to Ivor Gurney and Chosen Hill with all the musical styles chosen to represent them.

This is a most welcome disc of the lesser-known side of Howells' output. It demonstrates so convincingly the spectacular future ahead of this 20-something-year-old forging his style.

– JOHN DRESSLER

Richard Rodney Bennett



Richard Rodney Bennett

Orchestral Music Volume 3
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Chandos CHSA 5230

This issue is the third compilation of RRB's music under the expert guidance of John Wilson, where the programme pattern is similar, that is a symphony – here no 1 from 1965 – and a miscellaneous selection of further items. Symphony no 1 is from the period when he felt obliged to adopt serialism to gain



credibility in that unfortunate era when such techniques were thought to be the way forward. It just sounds noisy and brash to me (allegedly there are shades of 'Walton and Henze') but brilliantly played by the forces here, and if you like this sort of thing, you will not be disappointed.

Zodiac (1975), dedicated to Elisabeth Lutyens, is in similar style but crucially far easier to follow. It has what I would imagine to be a unique construction inasmuch as it has no fewer than 17 brief movements, each not much longer than a minute.

Each sign on the zodiac is sharply characterised by different instrumental groupings. They are bundled into groups of three which are introduced, separated, and concluded by a 'ritornello' which involves everyone.

What I daringly suggest is the real RRB is represented by two further, broadly tonal, works. The source of Reflections on a Sixteenth Century Tune is from a Josquin des Prés chanson and consists of a prelude, four variations and a finale. It was written for a youth string orchestra though there are seemingly few concessions to inexperience.

Interestingly the composer dedicated this work to John Wilson because he 'had a way with strings' which he 'carried around...from orchestra to orchestra'. This is an acute observation because the band's tone, sheen and warmth here are wonderfully apparent in this recording.

In some ways, to me at least, the most interesting piece on the disc is A History of the Thè Dansant which dating from 2011 will have been one of RRB's final works.

The verse is by the composer's elder sister Meg Ruth Peacocke evoking memories of her childhood. The booklet notes state that the parents were 'emotionally distant', yet clearly the undercurrents were more challenging.

The verse conjures up the spirit of the 1920's, and the music therefore alludes to the mood of 'Façade' (though the verse is sung) and Britten's 'Cabaret Songs'. The music is extrovert and very vigorous, and dashingy despatched by Sarah Connolly. The real kick in the piece is the extraordinary bitter-sweet instrumental coda, moments of a fragile tender beauty, and all the more moving given that it will have been a final envoi. As the

cliché has it, worth getting the disc for this alone.

- GEOFFREY ATKINSON

Colour And Light

20th Century British Piano Music
Nathan Williamson *piano*
SOMMCD 0196

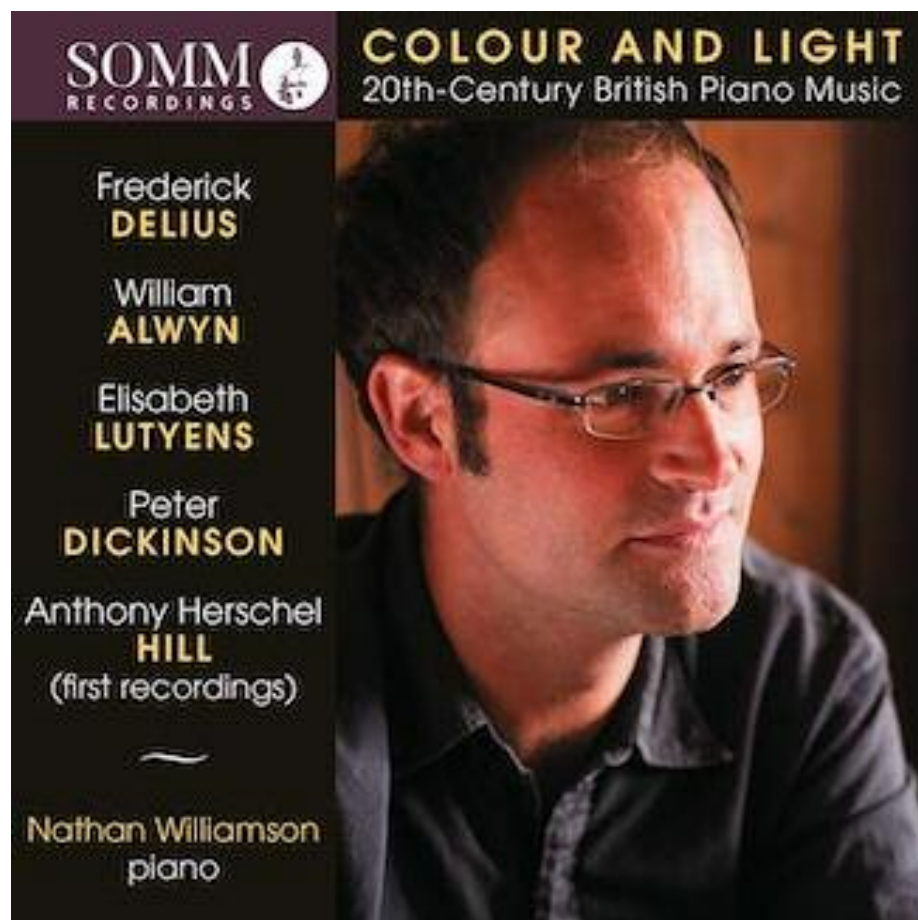
The five composers represented on this fine solo piano recital by Nathan Williamson all come from a period in British music when tonality was being explored to its outermost limits. Some of the composers, according to the accompanying programme note were borrowing techniques from serialists like Schoenberg even while producing music that sounded well within the realms of tonality.

The music ranges from Delius (1862 – 1934) at the start of the 20th Century whose compositions, though firmly tonal, were unique unto himself, to Elisabeth Lutyens (1906 – 83) who according to Nathan Williamson's programme note: 'claimed to have discovered' serialism 'entirely for herself, stating her reaction on first seeing a score of Schoenberg's ... "Oh, he's done this too"'. The final two pieces are by Anthony Herschel Hill (1939 – 2016) composing tonally at a time when such music is coming back into fashion with many contemporary composers in the United States and now in Great Britain.

'Twelve Preludes' by William Alwyn range from the gentle transparent simplicity of the first, through the second whose opening flourish reminded me of 'The Gnome' from Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' to the slow sad romanticism of number five dedicated to the memory of the New Zealand pianist Richard Farrell.

Numbers seven eight and nine suggest Debussy who was himself inspired by Eastern gamelan music, and finally the twelfth prelude, described by John Ogden as 'Interplay of colour and light', giving the CD its title.

Peter Dickinson's 'Paraphrase II' receiving its world première recording here is a Theme with six hugely contrast-



ing variations exploring the outer edges of tonality in a brilliant structurally refined way.

The Delius pieces are piano reductions of orchestral music, the first 'Nocturne' arranged by the renowned Delius scholar Robert Threlfall, and the two extracts from 'Margot la Rouge' given a unique sense of clarity by none other than Ravel. These are played deliciously by Nathan Williamson.

'The Ring of Bone' by Elisabeth Lutyens' even has verses of poetry by the composer spoken during the performance by Williamson – remarkable and eccentric, but also good fun.

The final pieces by Anthony Herschel Hill, also world première recordings, are 'Litany', with romantic and richly coloured piano writing, and the virtuosic 'Toccata', exciting and brilliantly well-structured – in itself well worth the price of this CD.

– ALAN COOPER

Josef Holbrooke

Symphony No. 3 Ships
Deutsche Radio Philharmonie
Howard Griffiths *conductor*
CPO 555 041-2

That vintage Elizabethan military folk tune, originally entitled 'The girl I left behind me', ricochets pleasingly around the brain in a fresh musical guise impishly disguised by that post-romantic master, Josef Holbrooke.

This oft-performed British folk song (many are bound to remember it!) is cleverly camouflaged by Holbrooke in stimulating successive variations, garnished with vivid orchestral colours which are guaranteed to bring a broad smile to any listener's face. It is not exactly what you might class as 'cerebral music' but the simple and sure languid strains have a charming impact on the ear. The finely balanced recording of 17 movements are wittily delivered by German Radio Philharmonie players, under the precise direction of the experienced Howard Griffiths.

The work opens with beckoning horn calls before the sweet variation theme is first revealed at a dashing allegro

pace, featuring memorable string and woodwind playing, studded by emphatic percussion. No wonder these variations were a favourite of Sir Henry Wood. They certainly seem to ensnare that youthful, raucous, last night of the Proms playful atmosphere.

A more serious and austere mood comes in this release's title track, Symphony No. 3 'Ships'. We hear a grandiose, pictorial orchestration of vessels of war, hospital ships and merchantmen making up a three-movement allegro, largo and finale. Holbrooke conjures up convincing scenes using his impressive orchestral paintbrush.

Inventive melodies based on a perceptive use of horns, trumpets, swirling strings and perky woodwind, depict scenes which could almost come right out of those treasured Naval museum grounds, Plymouth/Portsmouth harbours!

The magical mysteries of Welsh mythology are behind a 15-minute tone poem 'The Birds of Rhiannon'. Oboes and flutes suitably twitter, around some nice string and brass work.

Holbrooke (1878-1958) embraced an eclectic style and avoided academic structures such as the sonata form.

His penchant for style and colour was enough to leave an indelible mark on British musical art.

– CHRIS BYE

David Matthews

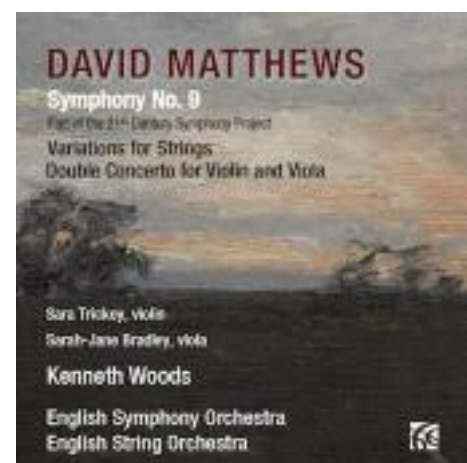
Symphony No. 9
Variation for Strings
Double Concerto
Sara Trickey *violin*
Sarah-Jane Bradley *viola*
Kenneth Woods *conductor*
Nimbus Alliance NI6382

The expressive 'voice' of contemporary British composer David Matthews shows a maturity that will strike a tonal accord with listeners. His long-awaited Ninth Symphony is another convincing illustration of that famous musical craftsmanship so treasured by Matthews' followers. It speaks clearly and unambiguously.

The work opens brightly, using material taken from a carol he composed

for his wife, Jenifer Wakelyn. It is attractively orchestrated throughout, somewhat akin in mood to the bright Mahler Fourth and Seventh symphonies. Matthews' Ninth is undoubtedly another fine piece of writing to emerge from the modern British music stable. Matthews – a devoted Mahlerian -- played a key part in helping Deryck Cooke to reconstruct a performing version of the Austrian composer's 10th Symphony. Is this where his passion for strong lyrical threads comes from?

This accomplished composer also aided an ailing Benjamin Britten to finish his final string quartet. Other influences over Matthews' eminent musical career have included Michael Tippett and Nicholas Maw.



Here is also a delicate waft of that celebrated Vaughan Williams anthem, The Lark Ascending, clearly betraying a thorough English pedigree. This is a release featuring glorious tones helped by some beguiling harmonies. Both the Variations for Strings and the more recent Double Concerto for Violin and Viola expose a real master of post-romanticism. Rhythmic energy sharply contrasts with some more plaintive moments and both soloists deliver with real panache. This searing string passages are vintage David Matthews.

This well-engineered recording finds a disciplined English String Orchestra proving to be impressive ambassadors for impressive works penned by one of the greatest musical minds of our time.

– CHRIS BYE

Arnold Griller

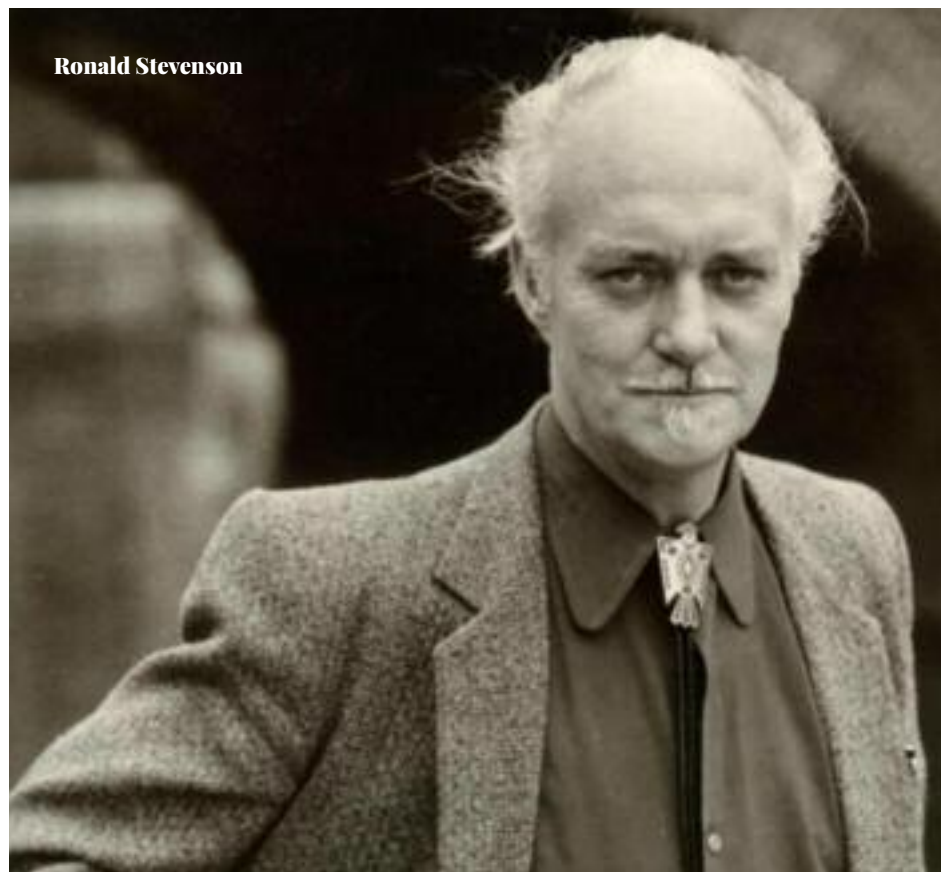
Orchestral Music, Volume 2
Musica Viva Symphony Orchestra
Alexander Walker *conductor*
Emin Martirosian *piano*
TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC 0460

Canadian composer and pianist Douglas Finch, currently Professor of Piano and Composition at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance has written the immensely helpful programme notes for this the second CD of Orchestral Compositions by Arnold Griller. The Symphony in particular has seven musical examples that act as milestones which help Finch's powerfully descriptive notes guide us through the complexities of Griller's writing. It is these complexities of harmony and counterpoint coloured by Griller's amazingly expressive use of instrumentation that power the special appeal of his music.

As in the first volume of his orchestral music, the four pieces on this second CD are performed with exceptional precision and clarity by the Moscow chamber orchestra Musica Viva conducted by Alexander Walker.

The first work on the CD is entitled Scherzoid (2017). With its angularity and trenchancy, it lives up to its title. Griller's style is unique to itself although Finch mentions Bartók and the later Stravinsky as similarities. I was reminded too of Hindemith. The piece opens with a murky sounding chorale-like introduction for three trombones and tuba before fireworks from lively and incisive writing for woodwinds and strings take over. Interestingly, the strings do not include violins at all, giving the music a darker flavour. Particularly important is the writing for timpani which gives a comforting heart-beat to gentler passages.

The timpani are also important at many points in Griller's only Symphony (2003 and revised 2010). This is a complex work which benefits from repeated listening. The different 'movements' follow on almost imperceptibly from one to another with titles like 'With uncertainty' or 'Searchingly' and this is where Finch's notes prove so helpful. Listening to the detailed orchestral writing and being led by Griller to a symphonic shaping that made sense was a real pleasure.



Ronald Stevenson

Introduction, Cakewalk and Allegro for Piano and Orchestra (2011) featuring piano soloist Emin Martirosian was the nearest Griller gets to fun in music. The Cakewalk theme was attractive and at the end, piano, glockenspiel and celeste create what the composer himself called a 'chorus of sparrows'.

The final work on the CD is Griller's Rhapsody Concertante. Once again, the complexity and sheer imagination of the orchestral colouring was the principal attraction. Here too, Finch's notes and three musical examples were so helpful.

- ALAN COOPER

Ronald Stevenson

Piano Music, Volume 3
Christopher Guild piano
TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC 0403

This is the third disc exploring Ronald Stevenson's piano music, and – thinking in retrospect – if numbers one and two are as well engineered and played as this then they will

also merit a strong recommendation.

As well as being a virtuoso pianist and composer, Stevenson was a devoted follower of Percy Grainger and his idiosyncrasies and enthusiasms. This is obvious in their singular approach to folk music and its arrangements – Britten remarked that Grainger was 'the master of us all' in this activity.

Stevenson matches Grainger in imagination and thoughtful response to folk material, observing the common ground between Scottish and Chinese and other traditional music especially in their use of pentatonic and hexatonic scales. So the 'Chinese Folk-Song Suite' here recorded does not sound at all strange in this context, and, even more oddly, neither does the 'Ghanaian Folk-Song Suite' where the final 'Leopard Dance' could almost have been derived from original Scottish material (maybe it was!).

The main item on the disc is 'Sounding Strings' an anthology of 14 Celtic melodies, unusually set out for either Clarsach (the small Scottish harp) or piano. 'Celtic' is deemed to include Welsh, Cornish, Manx, and Breton material, as well as Hebridean and Scottish Gaelic. These are mainly very straightforward but such is the skill with which the music is

arranged that one is scarcely aware of their basic simplicity (the easiest are barely grade 3!) I would like to mention here the lovely setting of 'The Ash Grove' which is surely Stevenson's own homage to Britten (rather than Grainger).

Grainger's 'Hill Song', which he began in 1901, is a substantial 22-minute work for large wind ensemble. Stevenson's transcription was intended as a tribute to the composer on his 78th birthday (this was the sort of arrangement Grainger would have done if he had got around to it). The music is a freely composed sort of 'stream of consciousness' with very little repetition. Grainger wanted it to be 'all theme and never thematic treatment.'

This is all very well, but the problem here is that however engaging the individual micro-segments are, the ear (well, my ear at least) yearns for some observable shape.

The disc concludes with 2 virtuoso Scottish arrangements and a hauntingly beautiful Northumbrian one 'Bonny at Morn'.

- GEOFFREY ATKINSON

Bairstow + Harris + Stanford

Choir of Westminster Abbey
Peter Holder – *organ*
James O'Donnell – *conductor*
HYPERION CDA 682591

A This disc provides the listener with a valuable overview of some aspects of the cathedral choral repertoire dating from the last two decades of the 19th century well into the mid-20th century.

What immediately strikes one is how well the CD programme works stylistically from Stanford's Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in A dating from 1880 through to William Harris's 'Strengthen ye the weak hands' a fine, richly scored anthem composed for the Canterbury Festival in 1949. It is, however Sir Edward Bairstow's masterly anthem from 1944 'Blessed city, heavenly Salem' that opens the programme and it is immediately apparent that here we have performances of



the highest quality from the Westminster Abbey Choir, the safe hands of James O'Donnell the organist and Master of the Choristers together with the sub-organist Peter Holder.

There are two other works by Bairstow: 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence', an early motet for unaccompanied choir that illustrates the composer's wonderful feeling for choral sonority and to follow 'The Lamentation' setting of the words of Jeremiah imbued with the style of Anglican chant.

Possibly, outside the organ loft, the least known of the trio of composers on this CD is Sir William Harris (1883–1973), the Organist and Choirmaster of St. George's Chapel, Windsor. Harris however was a skilful craftsman, illustrated by two masterworks: the eight-part motets 'Faith is the heaven' to a beautiful text by Spenser and 'Bring us O Lord God' – a setting of John Donne.

In addition, we have the anthem 'Strengthen ye the weak hands', already mentioned, concluding with a sonorous, if somewhat rambling organ solo, a 'Flourish for an occasion'.

The third of the trio is surely the best-known – Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, who, among his other roles was the Organist and Director of Music at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Stanford wrote extensively for the Anglican liturgy the A major Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis is a particularly vivid example with a particularly demanding organ accompaniment.

The beautiful pastoral 'O for a closer walk with God' provides an attrac-

tive contrast followed by a stunning performance of 'Lo I raise up' (one of Stanford's pièces de résistance). This excellently planned CD shows Stanford and the Abbey Choir at their best ending with rarely performed setting of the 'Gloria in excelsis' originally written for the coronation of George V in 1911. Here, particularly at the opening, there is more than a hint of Parry's 'I was glad'.

There is much to enjoy in this interesting, thought-provoking and magnificently performed CD. It is well worth exploring.

- GEOFFREY ATKINSON

Havergal Brian

Orchestral Music
New Russian Symphony Orchestra
Alexander Walker *conductor*
NAXOS 8.573959

The overture, based on the comedy by J.M. Synge, is a scintillating boisterous affair and is full of memorable ideas and orchestration and feels like a lost score by Korngold to a never produced swashbuckler. Mr Walker is almost one minute slower than Charles Mackerras' recording with the RLPO and the work loses some of its swash and buckle, but it is a nicely shaped performance with some finely played solos. Brian's Symphony No. 7 from 1948 at almost 40 minutes duration is the last of his

large-scale symphonies. The work was apparently inspired by Brian's reading of Goethe's autobiography and that it is an 'English symphony on a German topic'.

Not having read Goethe's work I cannot comment on its literary associations; however, as a symphony it has all the hall marks of Brian's style. Much material is given to brass and wind and the music therefore has a martial character, and indeed there are several marches in the work.

However, throughout its duration I do not get a feeling of symphonic shaping of the materials, there are many imaginative sections, but they remain that, sections, rather than a symphonic whole. The orchestra gives it a good shot though some high string passages are not quite in tune. Charles Mackerras' recording once again outshines this one by shaping the disparate materials into a more convincing whole.

The 16th symphony was written in 1961 when Brian was 85 and lasts just 15 minutes. The shorter time span works well for Brian's collage of materials and the episodes do here hold together.

It begins, after a rumbling chord, with a pastoral theme passed between the woodwind, but the symphony is anything but pastoral and soon the enormous forces including six horns and 10 percussionists lead off into more troubled territory.

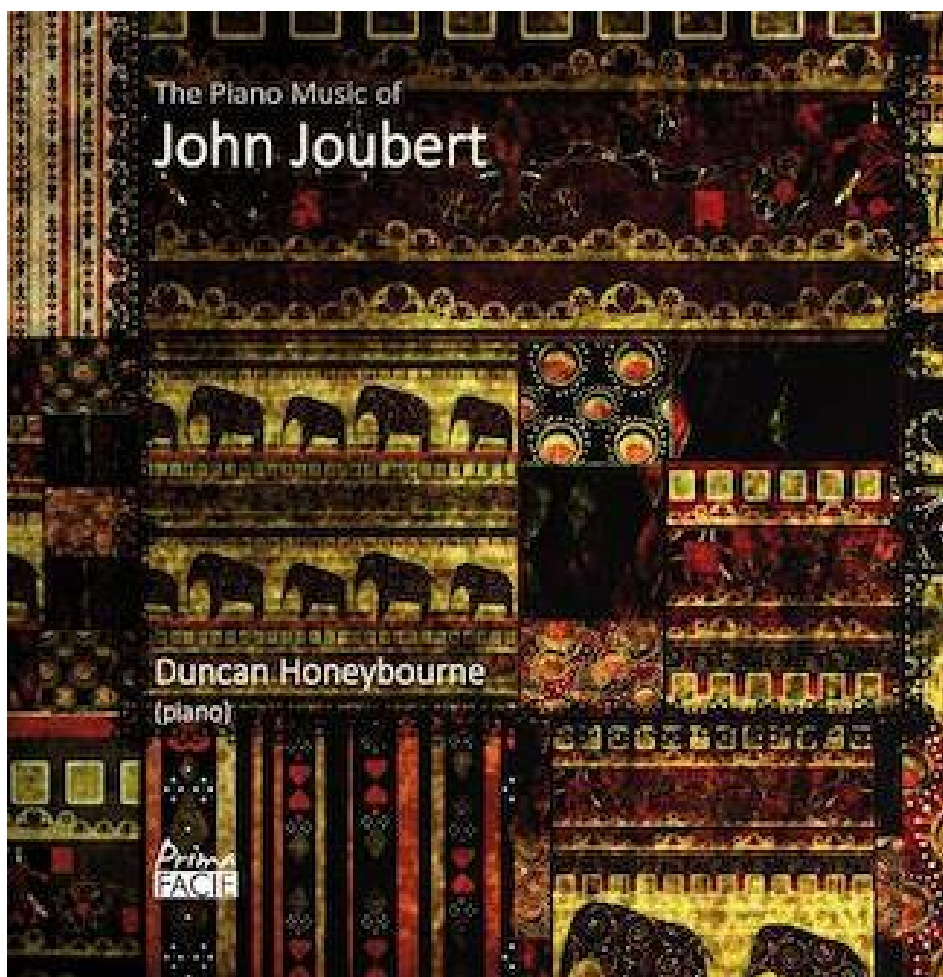
Here Mr Walker is not able to draw from his orchestra the vehemence that Myer Fredman pulled from the LPO in his Lyrta recording. The malice in the Fredman recording is palpable and his build up to the final inconclusive chord is shattering but logical. In Mr Walker's version it is an unwelcome surprise.

- PAUL RW JACKSON

John Joubert

The complete Solo Piano Music
Duncan Honeybourne *piano*
Prima Facie PFCD097

The expressive keyboard technique of pianist Duncan Honeybourne shows just what a great musical ally he was to composer, the British South



African, John Joubert.

The two formed a close relationship when, as a student, Honeybourne met the composer in Birmingham. Honeybourne worked extensively with Joubert and helped the composer complete his Second Piano Sonata, premiered in 2006. Joubert dedicated his Third Sonata to Honeybourne.

This noteworthy recording of Joubert's complete piano works, crisply engineered in Southampton's Turner Sims Concert Hall, can therefore boast an impeccable provenance.

It is a perfect illustration of Joubert's dramatic writing and certainly serves as a convincing testimony to Joubert's sad death earlier this year. Joubert leaves an unfilled gap on the world stage, as a versatile and unique composer of considerable, wide-ranging musical talent. From a flamboyant dance Suite (1956) of five short movements through to the Third Piano Sonata (2005 revised 2010) this fascinating release shows how Joubert's composing technique developed over his career.

These works are passionately delivered with the clear influences of Bartok and specifically Stravinsky's Rite of Spring. Sharply contrasting chorale-like melodies convincingly flow through all three piano sonatas. In the Second there are tempestuous passages, particularly in a finale headed, Poco Lento. Is this Joubert reflecting on the appalling apartheid times South Africa?

Anti-war sentiments continue in the Third Sonata which Joubert prefaces with the Thomas Hardy sonnet, "We are getting to the end of visioning" and adds "My sonata can be taken as an attempt to express in musical terms the message of the Hardy sonnet".

In the Lyric fantasy, based on themes from Act 2 of Joubert's triumphant opera Jane Eyre, moody passages contrast well with more strident moments. These are bold piano works that have earned their place in classical music history.

- CHRIS BYE

C.H.H. Parry

Chamber Music

Leonore Piano Trio with Rachel Roberts
Hyperion CDA68276

In the late 19th century some French composers, like Fauré, resisted the influence of German music, but their British contemporaries, like Parry, accepted it.

Parry wrote his Piano Quartet in A flat major in 1879 and his Piano Trio No. 2 in B minor in 1884, before the comparable works by Fauré. This was a highly creative period in Parry's life, during which he also wrote choral and orchestral works and was appointed Professor of Musical History at the Royal College of Music.

Jeremy Dibble, who wrote a monograph on Parry's life and music, and has done a great deal to promote his music, contributed the informative notes to this recording. He describes these pieces as "big-boned," which suggests their scale, passion and structural strength.

However, it does not prepare us for the gentle, even delicate, quality of parts like the lovely slow movement of the trio. Indeed, one of the striking features of both works is the great contrasts Parry achieves between the boldly dramatic and the lyrical sections.

Such contrasts are part of sonata form, of course, and also the essence of the scherzo and trio duality. Both pieces were written for and premiered by Edward Dannreuther, a German pianist who settled in England and who featured Brahms's chamber music in his concerts.

Brahms had completed his third piano quartet in 1874 and his influence is clear. There is also Schumann here, in terms of the more active and extrovert Florestan and the contemplative and introverted Eusebius.

Both pieces are in the conventional four movements, and include a slow movement and a scherzo with trio. The slow introductions to the first movements, which are in sonata form, indicate the scale and seriousness of what is to come. Parry includes cyclic references by incorporating elements from the first movements in the finales.

Both works were successful and were frequently performed in the 1880s. It



is hard to understand the general neglect of such excellent music, which should be well-received in any festival. The performances and recording are exemplary and this CD should be welcomed as a signifi-

cant contribution to what ought to become a major revival of Parry's music.

- NIGEL BOLLAND

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