



BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY

news

Autumn 2020

Never forgotten

*The British musicians
remembered by plaques*



11 pages of reviews

*Including acclaimed
BMS CD release:
Schellhorn plays
Howells piano music*

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

*BMS members on
the impact of the
pandemic*

Will R. Barnes
19/08/2020





Chairman's welcome

Dear Members,

There has been a lot of change in all our lives since the last Printed News. The British Music Society is responding to the challenges now facing most sectors of the arts and is in a better position to explore the ever more important realm of digital communication further with the new website now 'live' and ready to be developed further according to our wishes.

With the help of Revolution Arts, we successfully staged our first AGM on Zoom on July 31 and were pleased with the number of members able to attend. The age group was wide ranging from newer members in their twenties to those in their eighties, and there was greater geographic diversity as might be expected with some members attending an AGM for the first time.

We welcomed two new committee members: Dirick von Behr was voted in at the AGM as Secretary and Dr. Jonathan Clinch who joined online during the AGM! Our thanks also to Kevin Mandry as a new contributor on Geoffrey Atkinson's Review Panel. It's great to see our members being more 'hands on' and I would like to encourage this growing trend. Remember, a Society is very much a reflection of its members and their interests.

Excellent reviews of the latest BMS recording of Matthew Schellhorn performing Howells' piano music are in circulation; the CD took pride of place on the cover of International Piano Magazine as well as being placed at number 4 in the Classical charts by July 19. Search for *Gramophone* magazine online to read an article highlighting Matthew's unique relationship with composers both past and living. It was great to hear Matthew as an invited guest on BBC Radio 3's 'In Tune' recently to promote the disc.

With all good wishes

- Dr. Wendy Hiscocks

British Music Society committee

The committee comprises:

Wendy Hiscocks (Chairman), John Gibbons (Vice Chairman), Stephen Trowell (Treasurer), Dirick von Behr (Secretary), Dominic Daula (Journal Editor), Dr Jonathan Clinch. Advisory role: Karen Fletcher

Printed News designed by Revolution Arts

News

British Music Society's news and events

Holst Society plans 150 year anniversary in 2024

Holst Society Chairman, Chris Cope, updates us on their forthcoming plans to celebrate Gustav Holst's 150th birthday anniversary in 2024.

In January 2024, Paul Hindmarsh, artistic director of the RNCM Brass Band Festival, will feature a number of works by Holst as a precursor to the launching of a major CD of music for brass band by Holst including the Moorside Suite, First and Second Suites, St Paul's Suite, Marching Song, Fugal Overture and The Perfect Fool. The Society is also arranging a brass transcription of Holst's Scherzo and Mr Silkret's Folly (Capriccio).

On the May Day bank holiday weekend there will be a Holst festival conducted by Adrian Partington (one of the Society's vice presidents) at Gloucester Cathedral. Later that month the English Music Festival will also feature Holst's music.

The Society hopes that the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester and the Proms will also feature music by Holst. The Holst Birthplace Museum annual birthday concert

in late September 2024 will be an all exclusive Holst programme.

In addition, four recordings have been sponsored. These include two CDs devoted to part-songs, a joint project with the Vaughan Williams Society to include works for voice and piano by Vaughan Williams and Holst and a CD devoted to Holst's Christmas and organ music.

Future recording plans include:

- * a CD of Holst's sacred music with Will Vann conducting the Royal Chelsea Hospital Choir.
- * a recording of Holst's operetta Lansdown Castle.
- * a project with the BBC National Chorus of Wales to feature a number of previously unrecorded choral works..

As members of the British Music Society will appreciate, the recording of music is an expensive project. As always, we are fully dependent upon external funding. We hope that members of BMS will be able to assist with these exciting projects. For details and how to be a member email: chairman@holstsociety.org

Meet the new BMS trustees

“My name is **Dirick von Behr** and I live in the Netherlands.

For some years I have been a member but never an active one - I read the Newsletters and News.

The last few months have made me look again and rediscover what seemed forgotten or even lost and I realised how valuable these publications still are.

Nothing is as straightforward as it used to be and I would like to extend my support of the Society beyond paying my membership over so many years - even though I can't recognise a single note of music...”



Dr Jonathan Clinch is

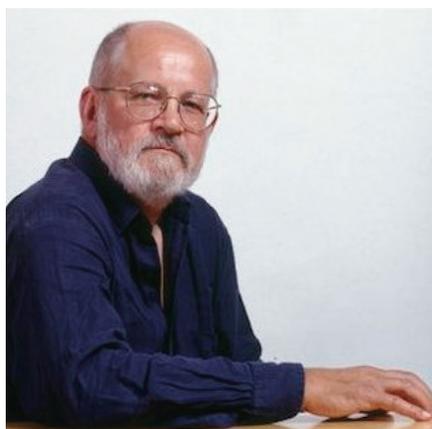
Lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, where he teaches courses in British music, musical analysis, listening skills and music history.

Previous posts include Organ Scholar of Keble College Oxford, Research Associate at Cambridge University Faculty of Music, and Frank Bridge Research Fellow at the Royal College of Music.

His current work focuses on Herbert Howells, Frank Bridge, Edmund Rubbra and Rutland Boughton.



Wanted: information about two composers



NICHOLAS MAW

Ian Rutland Boughton has been in contact with the British Music Society about his cousin's research into the life of Nicholas Maw.

"My cousin William Boughton...is seeking anyone who may have known Nicholas Maw or worked with him or can provide any material.

"William conducted the recording of Maw's *Spring Music and Voices of Memory* with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales for Lyrita.

William now lives in the USA and is keen to explore as much about the composer as is available.

If you have more information, email ianrboughton@btinternet.com or call 07703 584 152.

CHARLES DAVIESON

Do any BMS members have any information about Charles Davieson 1845-1914?

He was a reputable pianist, composer and teacher. The British Library have copies of some of his compositions.

The RNCM Collection includes a locket which once belonged to Charles Davieson containing a small piece of cloth which is, reputedly, a fragment of Beethoven's shroud (pictured below).

Charles was the son of David Davieson an eminent doctor from the Manchester and Liverpool area. He was also apparently a great, great nephew of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.

Charles seems to have studied at three European music conservatories but mainly in Leipzig. He returned to England in 1867 after gaining his Diploma and winning a prestigious prize.



During the 1870s it appears that he lived in London and then Bath. After his marriage to Fanny Elizabeth Whattoff in 1883 at West Malvern they lived in Torquay for a while before moving to Gloucester and later Cheltenham. By 1901 they had retired to St Leonard's on Sea.

If you have any further details email info@jonathandelbridge.com



Violinist performs first socially distanced concert

I was delighted to give my first concert since lockdown on 12 August to an audience of 12 in a Highgate garden.

The programme for solo violin consisted of music ranging over exactly 300 years from Bach's Chaconne and Sarabande of 1720, to 2020. The platform was unique – wooden scaffold boards below and above, with the Victorian house wall acting as sound board.

I'd previously given a concert of Beethoven Quartet op.131 for the host, Michelle Berriedale-Johnson, widow of the well known recording producer James Mallinson, at whose memorial concert I'd been asked to perform with pianist Joanna MacGregor the last movement of Messiaen *Quartet for the End of Time* – from my first album, in 1994.

I'd then invited Michelle to my own Loft Concert which inspired her to set up salon soirées in her home.

During lockdown I'd gone back to the classics – solo Bach, Beethoven Violin Concerto etc. I had been thinking about repertoire for an all solo violin concert after recording a piece specially written for me by Richard Blackford called *Worlds Apart*. This was dedicated to those separated during lockdown, for the album 'Many Voices on a Theme of Isolation' supporting HelpMusiciansUK.

Caprice (1990) by Wendy Hiscocks made a fine pairing with Grazyna Bacewicz Kaprys *Polski* (1949), Stuart Jones's *Kothektche* (1987, from my NMC album) and Joseph Horowitz's *Dybbuk Melody*. I also performed Elliot Carter *Riconoscenza per Goffredo Petrassi* (1984), a piece from my New York days as a Fulbright Fellow.

The weather was kind and it's made me want to do more!

Madeleine Mitchell

Sir Mark Elder introduces Butterworth's A Shropshire Lad

On 8 May 2020, the anniversary of VE Day Sir Mark Elder, music director of the Hallé Orchestra introduced the Hallé's recording of Butterworth's A Shropshire Lad from the 2003 album *English Rhapsody: Butterworth, Delius & Grainger*.

To see it visit: <https://youtu.be/spyKRvi-Ls>



Distinguished organist Jennifer Bate dies

A distinguished Life member of the British Music Society since 1980 as well as a Vice President, Jennifer Bate OBE lost her life to cancer on 25 March.

Having received professional training from an early age from her organist father H. A Bate, Jennifer chose to focus on a career as a concert organist with her life and repertoire reflecting her special affinity with living composers.

These included Sir George Thalben-Ball to whom she was married 1968–72, Andrzej Panufnik and Peter Dickinson. The most famous of these, however, was Olivier Messiaen whom she first met on home ground in Muswell Hill through a BBC connection.

A long-lasting friendship and collaboration with the French composer resulted in her giving the world premiere of Messiaen's *Livre du Saint Sacrement* in 1986 with the quality of her subsequent

recording under the composer's guidance acknowledged by a Grand Prix du Disque.

Her recordings of the complete organ works of Mendelssohn, made in All Saints Margaret Street, London, were also highly acclaimed.

Bate's highly successful performing career demanded her being abroad for up to ten months of the year touring and she made four appearances at the BBC Proms.

As well as receiving an OBE, Bate received an investiture as Officier des Arts et des Lettres and Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur (2012).

The BMS, on behalf of its members, would also like to remember Jennifer for her significant contributions as a performer to our events over many years.

Jennifer Bate OBE; born 11 November 1944; died 25 March 2020



Jennifer Bate is pictured above in 1987 playing the organ of La Trinité, Paris, with Olivier Messiaen registering

Obituary: composer Gerard Schurmann aged 96

Gerard Schurmann's life and compositional career has followed a somewhat unusual trajectory.

Birth and childhood in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) with, following his father's death in 1929, a short intervening period in Europe between the ages of four and seven.

Aged 17 a move to England, where he had volunteered for wartime flying duty, joining the Netherlands squadron of the RAF (four years' service); after the war, first as acting cultural attache at the Netherlands embassy, where he was responsible for introducing Rawsthorne, Tippett, Lutyens and others (also Sir Adrian Boult) to Holland.

Then a two-year stint as conductor with Dutch Radio at Hilversum, followed by settlement in England for the next 31 years; a final move to Los Angeles in 1981 where he died on 24 March at the age of 96, at his home in the Hollywood Hills, with his second wife Carolyn at his side.

Gerard has written of his childhood in his fascinating but unpublished memoir *Gardens of Exile*. His father was Dutch, his mother of mixed Dutch, Hungarian and Javanese ancestry and a gifted pianist. 'Our house was within earshot of the local gamelan orchestras...at Festival time celebrations and the sound of gamelan music continued uninterrupted for days and nights on end...the sound of it



seems to be indelibly lodged in my subconscious'. And such experiences have left their mark on his compositional style.

Settled in England, Gerard embarked on a career divided between the composition of concert music, conducting in the UK, Europe and elsewhere and writing film scores; the entrée to the latter occupation stage-managed for him by Alan Rawsthorne – 'in some ways like a father to me' – and with whom he remained on terms of close friendship until Alan's death in 1971.

He also became friends with Francis Bacon, the initial inspiration of whose work gave rise to his earliest acknowledged orchestral masterpiece *Six Studies of Francis Bacon* (1968).

Full-scale concertos for piano, violin and cello followed, also a major

'opera-cantata' *Piers Plowman* for soloists, mixed chorus and orchestra [Three Choirs Festival, 1980].

There is also a substantial output of fine chamber and instrumental music, much of it written since his move to the USA and recorded on the Toccata Classics label.

A CD of suites from his film scores was released by Chandos last year, and a recording is planned to include his last orchestral work *Gaudiana*, inspired by Barcelona's still unfinished cathedral La Sagrada Família, and his earlier Piano Concerto.

Gerard was an extremely self-critical and correspondingly unprolific composer, but such a varied body of work is still impossible to sum up. Patric Stanford spoke of: 'A composer who knows exactly what is to be said and, in terms of the orchestra, exactly how to say it with skilful lucidity'.

But let Gerard himself have the last word, in a sentence to which, I think, the whole of his musical output attests: 'In the chaos in which we live, a strong personal statement is in the end the only thing of any interest'.

Nigel Bonham-Carter
Chair, The Schurmann Foundation

Gerald Schurmann, born 19 January 1924, died 24 March 2020

A farewell tribute to BMS member Oliver Davies who has died aged 81

It is with great sadness that I report on the death of pianist Oliver Davies on Wednesday July 1 from pancreatic cancer at the age of 81.

Oliver is one of those irreplaceable figures in British music making. His enthusiasm and knowledge were truly remarkable, and when I last saw him over a year ago he was working tirelessly on another project close to his heart, the Museum of Music History (<http://www.momh.org.uk>) of which he was curator.

I took the opportunity to drive down to Dorking where Oliver housed the collection and he took pride in showing me some of the rare concert programmes among much other material housed in the Museum.

He was an extraordinarily talented individual and an English eccentric, but his modest manner was refreshing and it was evident that his genuine love of music took precedence over self-promotion.

One of his last CD recordings with flautist James Dutton (pictured here with Oliver) was reviewed by the BMS but it is worth revisiting as a great example of the breadth of Oliver's interests and extensive research.

Idyll: The English Flute Unheard can be bought from the Mike Purton

Recording website and Mike has kindly allowed us to reproduce Oliver's short biography below.

Dr Wendy Hiscocks



Oliver Davies studied at the Royal College of Music, where he won the Tagore Gold Medal as outstanding student of his year and for many years was both a piano professor and Keeper of the Department of Portraits and Performance History (which he founded).

His playing career covered many styles, from recordings, recitals and

broadcasts on early pianos to modern British premières at the Wigmore and Queen Elizabeth Halls.

As a chamber-music player he has appeared with many distinguished artists including the flautists Sir James Galway, Michael Cox and Philippa Davies, and the clarinetists Colin Bradbury and Dame Thea King.

He is particularly known for his programmes on special themes, including scholarly reconstructions of historical concerts (for Aldeburgh and the BBC), surveys of the musical histories of great British houses, and re-assessments of historically significant composers and performers.

Further reconstructions have been of period balls (the National Portrait Gallery and the V&A), melodramas (the Theatre Museum) and silent film scores (The National Film Theatre).

Recent projects included *The Great War and the Violin* (2014) and *Great Violinists at Drury Lane* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 2016), both with violinist Robert Gibbs, and a double CD with cellist Adrian Bradbury of the operatic paraphrases of Alfredo Piatti.

To read Norman Lebrecht's posting and performance by Oliver Davies and Adrian Bradbury, visit <https://slippedisc.com>

'Hurlstone man' dies

John will probably be best remembered as the 'Hurlstone man', having spent the last 20 years trying to bring the music of William Yeates Hurlstone (1876 - 1906) to public notice, *writes Audrey Williams*.

He did give a talk to the British Music Society and also at the English Music Festival, amongst many others. Despite his best efforts, in which I was also trying to help, sadly Hurlstone's music is still largely unknown and efforts to have him such as with Composer of the Week have not come to anything.

An architect by profession, he took early retirement and started giving talks on various subjects, including the London Marathon in which he took part 11 times.

He also studied singing with Fabian Smith, who was a good friend of Hurlstone's youngest sister Kay and thus came to hear about her brother, describing his find as 'an ar-

chaeologist discovering another Fishbourne Palace.' In 2006, the centenary of Hurlstone's birth, we put on several concerts of his works at Haywards Heath Music Society, of which I was Chairman at the time.

Occasionally something by him is played on Radio 3 but the general reaction, on hearing his name, even from many well known musicians is 'who?' John described him as the missing piece of the English Musical Heritage and whereas this may be something of an exaggeration, his music does deserve more recognition.

John Humphries, born 3 February 1934, died 11 March 2020.



Musical lives lost

We record with regret the sad death of violinist **Ida Haendel** (1923 (or 1928) - July 1st 2020). She will be remembered for her masterly performances of the classic violin concertos, including especially the Sibelius, the Britten and the Walton, all of which she played both in public and for the gramophone.

Also, the death of guitarist **Julian Bream** (1933- August 14th 2020) who popularised his instrument to the post-war generation. He will be remembered by BMS members particularly for his work with Benjamin Britten, whose *'Courtly Dances from Gloriana'* became a best-selling RCA recording in the 60s. He also played lute music by Dowland and others and recorded Elizabethan lute songs with Peter Pears.

Sadly, we also report the death, due to cancer, of the well-known and respected lecturer on music, **Terry Barfoot** on 12 August 2020. He contributed to books on music history, presided over summer schools at Oxford and was also a frequent reviewer of new recordings. He will be missed by many, especially those whose own musical knowledge was enhanced and enlivened by his own infectious enthusiasm.

Andrew Youdell

NEWS: AGM 2020

This report covers the key areas of the BMS's activities during 2019-20 as follows:

E-News

Nicholas Keyworth of Revolution Arts continues to do a splendid and reliable job on the monthly E-news released to members on the 1st of every month. The original charge of £100 per month is still in place.

Printed News

Revolution Arts produced three 16-20 page Printed News at a cost of £600 per issue. Although the product is of high quality and very much enjoyed by its recipients, the numbers receiving the Printed News continues to fall. It is estimated that roughly 25% of members receiving the Printed News are also subscribing to the E-news. The Society is still able to afford the considerable cost of producing the Printed News for another year but this expense will eventually need a review.

Recordings

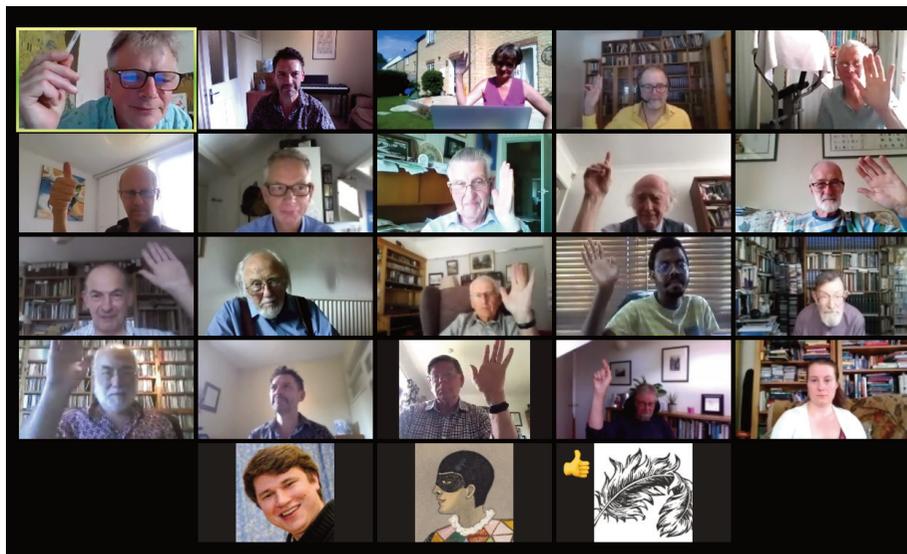
We are pleased to announce the Naxos digital download release of the BMS recording of Fricker's five movement *Serenade No. 5, Opus 87* (8.571381). This was recorded in 2015 by the Villiers Quartet with James Dickenson (violin) and Nicholas Stringfellow (cello).

The AGM saw the BMS' official launch of Matthew Schellhorn's world premiere recording of Herbert Howells piano music; this project was jointly funded with the Howells Trust. There was ample enough material for Naxos to propose two volumes resulting in the launch of volume one this year. A second volume is proposed for 2021 subject to sufficient funding. We are delighted with the amount of press coverage and favourable reviews the CD has received so far. Our sincere thanks to Matthew for all his hard work.

BASC 2019 and BASC 2020

BMS member Nigel Foster, as Director of the London Song Festival, skilfully guided the 2019 British Art Song Competition (BASC 2019) to fruition. With the poet Walt Whitman as the compulsory element for competitors, some lesser known repertoire surfaced such as Knussen's *The Dalliance of the Eagles*, Maconchy's *Sun, Moon and Stars* and Harty's *Sea Wrack*. Ten vocal and piano teams were selected from the round of auditions to participate in the masterclass with Roderick Williams on December 10 at the 1901 Arts Club in London.

The masterclass concluded with Roderick Williams awarding the single £800 prize (£400 from the BMS and £400 donated by our Treasurer Stephen Trowell) to the team of Olivia Boen (soprano) and Camille Lemonnier (piano).



BMS members taking part in the online AGM held via Zoom this year due to the coronavirus pandemic

Two more artists were highly commended: baritone James Williams and pianist Adam McDonagh (not part of the same duo) who received the Chimes vouchers unclaimed from the Amy Yuan Competition earlier in August.

There are no plans for BASC 2020 due to the current health.

Amy Yuan Academy New Talent Music Contest 2019

Stephen Trowell and Wendy Hiscocks attended the prize giving ceremony held in the Old Speech Room at Harrow School in Middlesex on 10 August 2019. Numbers attending had swelled from the previous year with participants ranging from four years of age to budding professionals in their early twenties; there was a well balanced mix of Asian and Western competitors.

The BMS awarded two prizes for the best performance of its own editions of scores by the following composers:

- * Sir Charles Stanford Arietta Variations (violin and piano)
- * Thomas Dunhill The Sailor's Hornpipe (piano solo)
- * Granville Bantock 'Desolation' (voice and piano).

The two prizes consisted of a British Composer Profiles and a £30 Chimes voucher with which to purchase British music. One prize was awarded to violinist Naori Takahashi, a scholarship postgraduate student at the Royal Academy of Music, studying violin performance under Professor György Pauk at the time of the competition, for her interpretation of the Stanford.

The other was given to HanYang Liu, a young Chinese pianist about to move to London to study at Harrow School for his performance of the Dunhill.

Disappointingly, there were no 'takers' for the Bantock song. BMS member Amy Yuan, made the decision to move the competition online for the summer of 2020.

The Society responded by sponsoring a single prize of £100 for the best performance of a British composition composed after 1860. The deadline for those wishing to compete in the third New Talent Youth Music Competition is August 3rd 2020.

BAX Blue Plaque

BMS member Chris Bye successfully guided an application to Historic Environment Scotland for a bronze plaque in honour of Sir Arnold Bax at the Morar Hotel in the Scottish Highlands. Unfortunately, the proposed unveiling of the plaque on 17 April 2020 had to be abandoned owing to Covid-19. We are informed that the plaque will still be made by the foundry and are awaiting a new date for the unveiling.

Approved wording for the plaque is as follows: Sir Arnold Bax 1883-1953, Composer, A winter resident 1928-1940 completed many of his finest compositions in this hotel.

Journal

Journal editor Dominic Daula, initiated the BMS Fortieth Anniversary Essay Competition. Matthew McCullough of Durham University wrote the prize winning essay titled *'A history and analysis of Gerald Finzi's Dies Natalis'*.

The essay was published in Volume 41, 2019/1 and Matthew was awarded a prize of £100 donated by a generous member of the Society who wished to remain anonymous.

Dominic fulfilled the role of internal adjudicator and engaged Dr Brian Inglis of Middlesex University to act as external adjudicator.

Report on the Journal by Dominic Daula

Volume 41, which aligns with the 2019 calendar year, is the last which comprises of two editions.

The first was published in October of 2019; the second will be delivered to the printers at the end of July. Thus, deliveries may be expected from the middle of August onward.

This forthcoming edition comprises three essays: the first dates from 1980 and is a reprint of a short article on John Raynor; it concludes the Journal's 40th Anniversary Series.

The second article is a profile on John Locke, who lived in Derby. The article is by his daughter, Dr Elizabeth Manning. The third article is on the relationship between Michael Tippett and Wilfred Franks. The identity of the author may not yet be revealed, as the review process is currently underway.

Book reviews have been contributed by Tonya Chirgwin, Dr Jürgen Schaarwächter, and Philip Wheldon-Robinson.

Concerning the sole edition for 2020, I have received three submissions—two of these are articles, and one is an obituary of Nicholas Temperley; this has been contributed by Emeritus Professor Stephen Banfield. This edition of the Journal will realistically be released in the first quarter of 2021.

BMS Treasurer's Report

This report is available by contacting Stephen Trowell

Review panel Co-ordinator and Editor Report from Geoffrey Atkinson

In the year to July 2020 the newsletter has carried approximately 60 reviews of CDs and 10 of books, so these clearly are an important feature of our activities.

In particular, the relevance of CD reviews is apparent from the fact that of the ones we have covered only about 15% have been noticed by the 'Gramophone' (the leading periodical in this field). You might say this is a reflection of the apparently limited regard some in authority have for our subject, and therefore our *raison d'être*.

Members may like to know how the present system works. Most companies (about 12 are active) send out PR announcements about new issues, and I am invited to request such as are relevant. Sometimes discs appear out of the blue.

As regards books, there are fewer publishers, again we are usually offered items of interest. I have asked the major ones eg Boydell & Brewer, and Wiley to offer first, because sometimes the subject is not relevant.

On one occasion I was sent three (very expensive!) books which were not of interest, and I told them, apologetically, that

this was so, and what should I do with them; they suggested I should give them to the local university library, which of course I was happy to do.

Reviewers are encouraged to be positive, but not to hold back where there are perceived failings, though always trying to be tactful, 'more in sorrow than anger', and not showing personal animosity. Sometimes items offered are of poor quality either in performance of recording (and both) and this can pose a dilemma.

There are about 10 active members of the review panel. When the CDs or books appear I have two options. Where I know an individual has a known affinity, knowledge or special interest, they have first refusal. Where this is not the case, items are offered via e-mail on a first come first served approach. Sometimes a reviewer may ask for a new issue before it is generally announced, and I am happy to oblige such keenness.

The reviews come back to me, usually, and helpfully, quite quickly. I then sub-edit them, sometimes abbreviating the text to conform approximately with the 400 word limit for CDs (books are allowed more leeway). It has to be said that some people's grasp of the principles of punctuation are, shall we say, vague.

I then submit the review to Nicholas Keyworth, who may again sub-edit, and then format for the Newsletter. Finally, I send copies of the E-News to all suppliers who have had an item reviewed.

In closing there are two points I would like to stress:

* New reviewers would be welcome - just get in touch with me.

* Please don't forget we have a 'Bite-back' facility where anyone can comment on matters of interest raised by a review - either positive or disputational.

Website

The new website is now live and Revolution Arts officially launched the site at today's AGM.

2021 AGM

We propose the 2021 AGM take place in the summer at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester and it is hoped that the luncheon AGM idea can be explored again. Details to be announced.

**Rubbra Piano Concerto**

I must both correct my colleague Gary Higginson - somewhat pedantically - and add an anecdote, concerning his review of the Rubbra Piano Concerto.

Ali Akbar Khan was an Indian and not a Pakistani and I had the privilege of meeting him at the Calcutta School of Music in 1975 whilst on a British Council tour.

Ali attended a recital I gave on a brand new and bright-toned Yamaha grand which included works by Purcell, Bridge and Rawsthorne. He invited me to his studio on the following day when he played his sarod to me and discussed the music.

I in return played him the *Sarabande* from Arnold Cooke's Suite in C. He had heard in the recital Purcell's *Saraband* from his own Suite in C, as well as the *Arioso* from Arnold's Suite No.2 which I was preparing for its world premiere in London's Purcell Room.

We mentioned many living British composers, including Rubbra, and Ali was stimulating and fascinating company as well as being a fine erudite musician.

Richard Deering

Bantock's not lost manuscript

Following the recent Book Review 'Granville Bantock: A Guide to Research', readers may wish to know that the manuscript full score of Bantock's song-cycle *The Sphinx* is not in fact lost.

It is actually located at University of Birmingham's Main Library (not the Cadbury Research Library), shelf mark GB 2/1/37.

Andrew H. King

Bite-Back features members' and readers' responses and feedback.

FEATURE

BMS MEMBERS RESPOND TO CALL TO NAME PLAQUES HONOURING FAMOUS BRITISH MUSICIANS

Never forgotten

Since 1866, hundred of blue plaques honouring famous names have graced buildings across the capital and increasingly further afield, writes *Nicholas Keyworth*.

BMS members were asked to let us know about blue plaques in their area which celebrate British musicians? Or maybe they are not blue at all?

They were also invited to submit details of a building near them which is connected with a British musician but is not identified in any way but they think it should be.

As artistic director of Corsham Festival in 2000, I commissioned a mason to carve a plaque in Bath stone for the Corsham home of composer Michael Tippett.



The plaque was unveiled by Meirion Bowen (*pictured above*) in the year 2000.

BRITTEN AND IRELAND



The picture (above) is of John Ireland's at Rock Mill, Washington (Ireland's old home), taken a couple of decades ago when it was possible to see it, before Biffa made such a mess of the site.

Also there is the plaque (pictured below) at The Old Mill, Snape, where Britten lived as well as a standard blue plaque at 4 Crabbe Street, Aldeburgh.



I also know of one in Hove where Roger Quilter used to live and the two in Chelsea for Ireland and Warlock. It will be good to see pictures in E-news of plaques which people are aware of and it's also a brilliant idea for a hard-copy book!

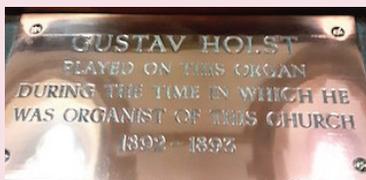
Dr Andrew Plant

HOLST

The organ in St. Laurence church at Wyck Rissington (*pictured left*) was played by Holst as a teenager in one of his first professional engagements as a resident organist and is still in use.

Holst would have passed the Victorian duck pond and drinking fountain on the village green on his journey from Cheltenham to the church and these can still be seen today.

Picture of Holst plaque below by BMS chairman Wendy Hiscocks.



TIPPETT

24 June 2000 saw the opening of the newly relaunched Corsham Festival with a concert of music by British composers with Tippett's Little music for Strings, Finzi's Clarinet concerto, Elgar's Serenade for Strings and Britten's Variations on a theme by Frank Bridge.

It was performed by the Corsham Festival String Orchestra comprising of students from the Royal College and the Royal Academy of Music.

It was also 40 years since Sir Michael Tippett moved to Parkside House in Corsham's High Street which was to be his home from 1960-1970.

It was here that he completed his operas 'King Priam' and 'The Knot Garden' from a little gazebo in the garden and also when he took up the reins of the Bath Festival.

As artistic director for the new festival it seemed fitting that we should mark this historic event with a plaque on his house.

This involved making overtures ~ to the new owners, getting the funding, contacting the local authority to apply for the necessary consents, and creating a suitable design. I was very keen that it should be in local materials - our wonderful Bath Stone.

So I found a young stone mason called Simon Boardley who carved the plaque so beautifully and edged the inside edge of the letters in gold so the summer light would bounce off his name in the summer light.

Tippett's companion and biographer, Meirion Bowen unveiled the plaque (*pictured right with Nicholas Keyworth and stonemason Simon Boardley, centre*).

Afterwards we explored the beautiful house and gardens which had been much improved since their day when it was a rather run down part of the Corsham Court Estate.



It always amuses me overhearing passersby who, 20 years on, still read the plaque with a mixture of fascination and bewilderment!

Nicholas Keyworth

RUBBRA

May I propose blue plaques for the major English composer Edmund Rubbra (1901-1986).

To my knowledge, no plaques to him are extant at present. There are several surviving buildings where either he was resident or taught which may be suitable:



- * Birthplace: 57, Cambridge Road, Northampton NN2
- * London Residence: 25, Hillcrest Avenue, London NW11 during the 1920s.
- * Residence: Valley Cottage, Highwood Bottom Speen HP27 from 1935 to 1957
- * Teaching: Former

Faculty of Music Building, University of Oxford, Holywell, Oxford OX1 from 1947 to 1968
 * Residence: 'Lindens', Bull Lane, errards Cross, Buckinghamshire SL9 from 1961 to 1986

Adrian Yardley

BUTTERWORTH

This photograph is of a plaque in York dedicated the composer George Butterworth which, as his biographer, I was kindly invited to unveil in 2016 at his boyhood home by the York Civic Society on the centenary of his death in the Battle of the Somme.



George and his parents lived at the house in Driffild Terrace from 1891 to 1910. Although George was away at Eton, Oxford and London for much of the time, it remained his home base until the family moved to Chelsea. The house now forms part of The Mount School for Girls.

In 2016, another plaque was unveiled by Petroc Trelawney at Radley College, where Butterworth taught for a year.

There is also a splendid monument to Butterworth's memory in the village of Pozières on the Somme near where he fell, erected by the villagers and which forms the centrepiece of a moving annual tribute.

I tried to have another placed on Butterworth's London home at 19 Cheyne Gardens, Chelsea some years ago but English Heritage declined as they didn't consider him 'famous enough'!

I guess the person I was dealing with was no musician.

Anthony Murphy

GORDON JACOB

Following your request for information on plaques for musicians I enclose two pictures showing the blue plaque for Gordon Jacob.

The location is 1 Audley Road, Saffron Walden, Essex, where Gordon and Margaret moved into in 1959 when they married.

The house is still lived in by Margaret and her husband Bruce today. The photos are part of an A4 collage of smaller photos given to me.

Although I was not able to be present at the unveiling on 17 June 2013, I became a close friend of Gordon Jacob over the years after I first met him in 1958.

Dr Geoff Ogram

Pictured below are Margaret Jacob Hyatt - Gordon's widow - and David Jacob, Gordon and Margaret's son.



FEATURES

Life in lockdown

In June we asked readers to tell us how lockdown had changed their lives. Thank you to everyone who responded. Here are lockdown stories from three BMS members.

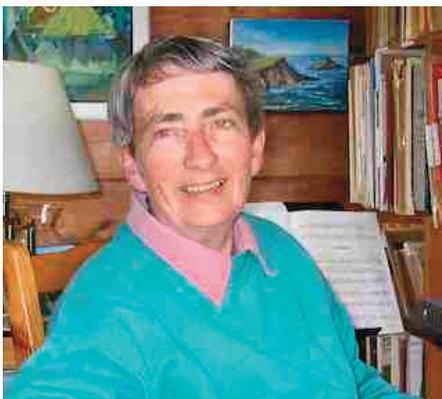


“I live by the sea in Cornwall and am fortunate to have a wonderful view and daily walks on the beach. There has been much to do in home and garden and I've been playing the piano regularly - though rarely the clarinet although it is my main instrument.

As conductor of two local orchestras we had to cancel our last concert in March but I look forward to resuming work with them in the autumn.

My native Cornwall has inspired much of the music I write though at present progress on a string quartet is very slow. I aim however to finish it by the end of lockdown!

I play a CD last thing at night and have covered much listening ground mostly chamber music and orchestral works: Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn to Hindemith, Stravinsky, Nielsen, Enescu and much British music including Britten, Tippett,



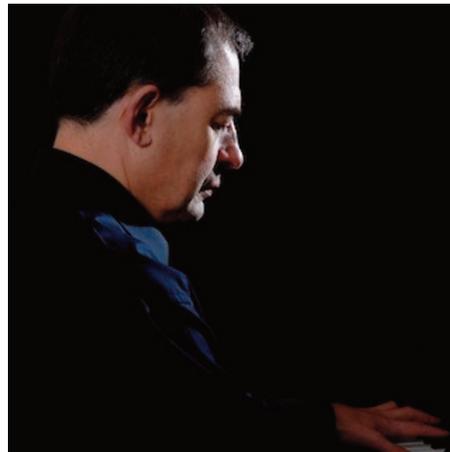
Finzi, Rubbra, Lennox Berkeley, Bowen, Maconchy, Howells, Bridge and others....

I look forward to reading what other musicians are doing during these strange weeks...”

Judith Bailey (pictured below left)

“Like many musicians, I have been unable to pursue all regular musical activity since mid-March. But looking positively on this outwardly-imposed situation has enabled me to get on with lots of writing, research - and more importantly, the time to get on with digitising onto USB memory sticks my entire collection of original manuscripts (mostly photocopies) - a process subjected in the past to endless procrastination!

In doing so it has been quite an experience going through all my music cupboards to be



reminded of what has been accumulated over nearly 50 years from many sources. More importantly, the vast majority of the photocopies are very likely to be the only second copies in existence. This work is almost complete and I am now working on a comprehensive catalogue.

Of the many composers listed the ones most immediately relevant to BMS will include: Edgar Bainton, William Gillies Whittaker, Armstrong Gibbs, Edward Isaacs, Peter Pope, Christopher Edmunds, Peter Collins, Mervyn Roberts, John Graves, H. Yeaman Dodds, Gaze Cooper, Richard Walthew, James Walker, Percy Sherwood, Herbert

Lumby, Dorothy Howell, Leslie Heward, Percy Young, Hayford Morris, Constance Warren, Elaine Hugh-Jones, Gunilla Lowenstein, Lawrence West, Peter Wishart in addition to many other composers of various nationalities.”

Michael Jones

“I started ‘Sundays at 4’ in 2016 - a short concert in our local parish church, Hoylandswaine, between Sheffield and Huddersfield.

It's a small village and the church is quite noteworthy, designed by William Crossland with a mural by Roddam Spencer Stanhope and a window designed by Burne-Jones. The acoustics are superb, especially for singing.

I have been giving a concert about every month and getting quite a decent following, bearing in mind where we are.

I sang my last concert on 15 March and the rest of the spring and summer concerts, featuring Beethoven songs, have gone by the board. So I have been live streaming a short performance every Sunday at 4.

I have no pianist here at home so I have pre-recorded my own accompaniment and I sing to that. At first I did songs unaccompanied but that was very restricting.

I shall continue to do this for as long as I need to, hopefully soon I will be able to go into church, maybe even with a live pianist.”

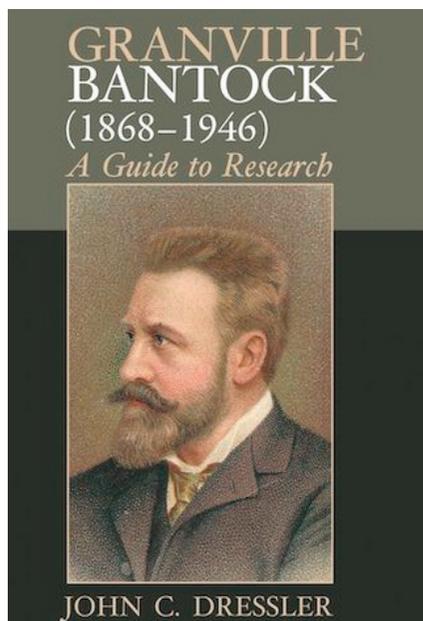
Elizabeth Charlesworth



Granville Bantock: A Guide to Research

John C. Dressler

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY PRESS
ISBN 978-1-942-95479-8



Bantock's compositional output was enormous, which may partly explain the absence of the monograph on his life and works that so many of his contemporaries have enjoyed.

Even to compile a list of sources is a massive undertaking and as such the present volume, John C. Dressler's book is a very welcome and useful addition to Bantock research.

It includes a great deal of information, including the location of manuscript sources, a discography, and an impressive bibliography including general references, obituaries, a list of Bantock's own writings, and details of archival material relating to Bantock at various libraries.

Trevor Bray's 1972 PhD thesis '*Granville Bantock: His Life and Music*' incorporated the first complete Bantock catalogue but was heavily criticized in the *Bantock Society Journal* (Vol.2, Winter 1997, p.43) for its myriad inaccuracies.

Dressler's book, whilst a laudable achievement, must similarly be used with caution. It is disappointing that the 'Biographical Sketch' contains a number of errors that could easily have been cleared up by consulting original sources.

Genealogical research has found that Bantock was one of eight children, not six (of which only four survived infancy). His student record confirms that he entered the Royal Academy of Music during in the Lent Term of 1889, only after winning the first Macfarren Scholarship.

His studies formally concluded in July

1892, but he remained at the RAM until 1895 as a sub-professor, a position which held no salary but brought with it a reduction in fees, allowing Bantock to continue his studies.

Curiously, Dressler confuses the Birmingham and Midland Institute (now the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire) and the University of Birmingham of which Bantock was simultaneously Principal of the School of Music (from 1900) and Peyton Professor (from 1908 following Elgar's resignation) respectively, conflating them into one establishment when they were (and, indeed, still are) entirely separate.

There are also mistakes in the works list. The librettist of Bantock's one-act opera *Caedmar*, for example, was the composer himself, not Frederick Corder, and the unpublished full score of *The Sphinx*, which can allegedly be found at the Cadbury Research Library is, in fact, lost.

Whilst these are only a few examples, further biographical and source inaccuracies remain, and the reader is urged to check details with original sources. The list of bibliographical sources, however, is a gift to any researcher looking for Bantock literature of all shapes and sizes from academic research to historic press reviews.

Whilst noting some of this book's usefulness to Bantock scholars, at the considerable cost of £95, this is a project that might have been better restricted to an online resource (the Cyril Rootham website is an excellent example) that could be constantly updated and easily corrected rather than an expensive print run likely to appeal only to libraries.

- Andrew H. King

Andrew is a doctoral student at the University of Birmingham, where he is scheduled to submit a thesis on Bantock's life and songs in early 2021.

Before the Baton: Musical Direction and Conducting in Stuart and Georgian Britain

Peter Holman

BOYDELL PRESS, WOODBRIDGE

This beautifully produced volume is a remarkable achievement - clearly the outcome of exhaustive, wide-ranging research. The book is arranged in two strands: part one, choral music and oratorio and part two, opera and theatre music.

British music is the book's primary focus although performance practice on the continent up to around 1700 is also considered.

The author, professor Peter Holman, adopts a consistently rigorous approach

throughout, being at pains to clarify his terms of reference from the outset.

The chosen subject has, as he remarks, 'received remarkably little scholarly attention'. Further, the author warns the reader against what he regards as 'a set of anachronistic assumptions' derived from modern baton conducting.

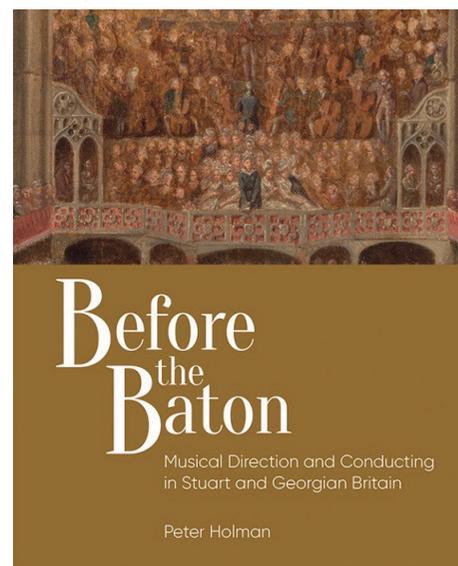
What, asks Holman, is the conductor for? He was not a maestro 'enforcing his personal interpretation in performance'. Instead, throughout this book, the author is keen to emphasize the importance of the collaborative nature of the conductor's role.

Quite early on (Holman takes us far as back the ancient world) there was a perceived need for an element of control, which Holman terms as 'a controlling hand'. Time beating was one of a range of strategies that instrumentalists developed to direct ensembles effectively while playing.

In the light of this, a range of repertoire is discussed in detail: 17th century Italian polychoral music from Venice, and polychoral music from German speaking areas. Around 1700 there developed a technique of time beating comprising a roll of music paper which became "a common 18th century time beating implement".

Other areas are examined exhaustively: directing from the organ, French choral music, large scale Italian secular music, as well as Italian and French opera. Holman identifies two traditions of directing opera 'until the 1750s Italian opera was directed by the maestro *Al Cembalo* placed against the stage in the left-hand corner of the pit with his bass players reading over his shoulder'. There was a second continuo group that enabled the singers to hear themselves and the accompaniment.

Opera music direction undertaken by the harpsichord continuo player soon transferred to a violinist. Holman quotes from a bilingual pamphlet describing the violinist



BOOK & CD REVIEWS

Pugnani as 'dominating the orchestra masterfully like a stalwart general in the midst of his troops'.

The book concludes with a consideration of two significant transitions: from harpsichord to piano and (a retrograde step in the author's opinion) from piano to the conductor's rostrum. This last development was a product of the increasing complexity of opera in particular.

Orchestral music was not far behind with the foundation, in 1813, of the Philharmonic Society. The presence of baton conducting was in part due to the appearance of luminaries such as Mendelssohn and Spohr 'although it took time for the Philharmonic's piano conductors to come to terms with baton technique and the new possibilities for control it offered'.

Professor Holman concludes his formidable survey of the developments in musical direction with a fiery polemic, questioning the appropriateness of the modern baton in pre 19th century music. He maintains that in the 17th and 18th centuries time beating was simple and functional, maximizing precision and minimizing control.

Holman is a distinguished practitioner in the field of early music and is particularly interesting in issues such as orchestral and choral layout.

Altogether, this is a stimulating and thought provoking read.

- Alistair MacDonald

BRITISH VIOLIN SONATAS

Clare Howick violin
Simon Callaghan piano

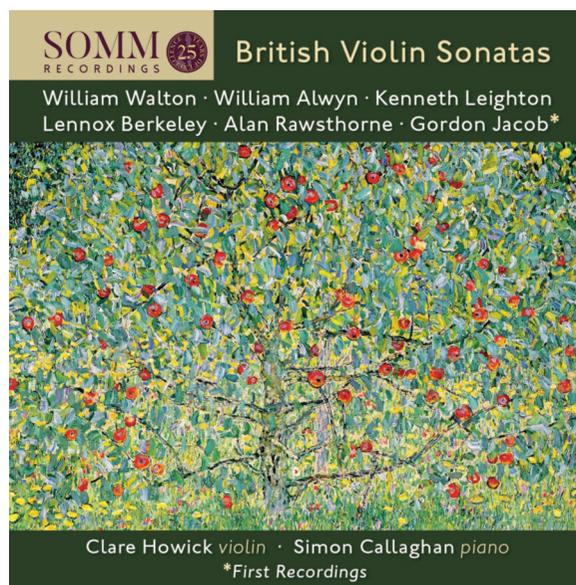
SOMMCD 0610

All the music on this CD, apart from the three short pieces by Gordon Jacob, which receive their first recording here, was written between 1933 and 1951. The major works are the sonatas by William Walton and Kenneth Leighton, both written around 1948.

Walton's is the best-known and longest piece. It was written for Yehudi Menuhin and Louis Kentner, who gave the first performance and made the first recording.

Menuhin described Walton's 'supreme joie de vivre, his exuberance, his love of physical sensation... His music is life-giving, life-embracing.'

The two movements, an Allegro tranquillo, in sonata form, and a theme with



seven variations present one of the outstanding British violin sonatas. And this performance is superb.

Leighton's sonata, written when he was only 19, is highly accomplished and deeply felt. In three movements, the piece shows real quality in its varied ideas and moods. Although lasting less than 18 minutes this is a substantial piece which deserves to be widely heard. I cannot imagine a better performance.

William Alwyn's Sonatina, an early work from about 1933, was unpublished and unknown for 75 years. It is attractively tuneful and full of interesting ideas.

As Geoffrey Atkinson wrote in a recent review of the recording by Tasmin Little and Piers Lane, it 'has poise and elegance', and I would add, considerable charm also.

The short pieces by Jacob, written between 1959 and 1975, unlike the other works here, reveal all they have on the first hearing. I even found 'Little Dancer' quite irritating the second time I heard it.

Alan Rawsthorne's "Pierette: Valse Caprice," written in 1934, is more interesting, though still slight. Played as well as it is here it would be a delightful encore.

Lennox Berkeley's 'Elegy' and 'Toccata', Op. 33, Nos. 2 and 3, are from 1951. Both are engaging and beautifully written for the violin. These would also make fine encores.

Clare Howick's tone is lovely and her technique impeccable, while Simon Callaghan is an able and sensitive partner. The recording is excellent and the balance between instruments is ideal. They sound intimate but not uncomfortably close.

Howick has recorded works for violin and piano by Scott, Elgar, Delius, Bridge, Smyth and Maconchy, amongst others, and concertos by Leighton, Jacob and Paul Paterson, the latter having been written for her.

It is good to know that British music for the violin is in such capable hands.

I hope she will record some more contemporary music. Meanwhile there is much here to admire and enjoy, and I heartily recommend this CD.

- Nigel Bolland

ETHEL SMYTH Songs and Ballads

Lucy Stevens contralto
Elizabeth Marcus piano
Berkeley Ensemble
Odaline de la Martinez conductor

SOMM RECORDINGS SOMMCD0611

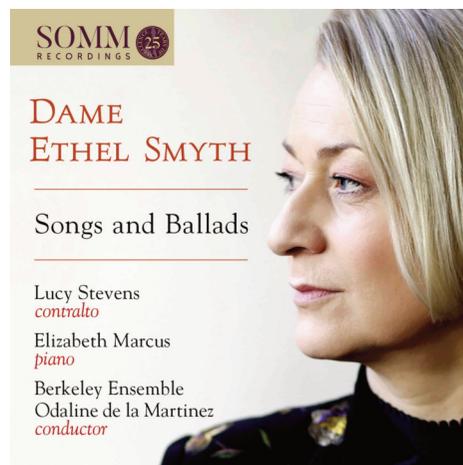
This timely issue provides a useful reminder of the wide range of Dame Ethel Smyth's output. In addition to six operas, an oratorio, a double concerto for the usual combination of violin and horn, she also composed a large number of smaller-scale works particularly an extensive collection of songs.

The present disc comprises a number of works for voice and piano as well as four songs for the imaginative combination of voice and chamber ensemble.

The Four Songs for mezzosoprano (here the admirable Lucy Stevens) flute, violin, viola, cello, harp and percussion open the CD. This unusual combination demonstrates the composers flare for textural integration.

The first three songs entitled 'Odelette', 'Dance' and 'Chryssilla' demonstrate an almost Debussyan delicacy - an illustration of Smyth's wide compositional range. The fourth song 'Anacreontic Ode' portrays a more robust musical language with a more vigorous energetic approach. Odaline de la Martinez remarks in the accompanying notes 'No wonder Debussy described these songs as tout à fait remarquables.'

The disc continues with a cycle of Smyth's early Op 3 songs that remind us of



the composer's German background. She studied at the Leipzig Conservatoire and was thoroughly immersed in German Texts. Op 3 were subtitled '*Lieder und Balladen*' although they are performed in the composer's English translation. All the songs on this disc receive ardent, committed performances from Lucy Stevens and Elizabeth Marcus.

In her enlightening notes De La Martinez makes interesting reference to these songs as reflecting Smyth's singular life and character - 'Her drive, her uncompromising public and private life and her passionate desires'.

Of the opus 4 songs of particular note is the '*Tanzlied*' in which the text (by Georg Büchner) is beautifully set with more than hint of Mahler in evidence.

Smyth's debt to the lieder style can also be found in the witty Schumannesque '*Nachtreiter*'. The song '*Nachtgedanken*' (Night Thoughts) illustrates one of Smyth's chief preoccupations, that of motherhood from the woman's point of view.

The CD concludes with songs that date from Smyth's period of political activism specifically the Suffragette movement. The '*Three Songs*' of 1913 date from the composer's time in prison. Here the musical language has a flavour that (among other composers) recalls Prokofiev.

Thus this is an intriguing disc, providing insights into a composer who was so much more than a caricature from the world of women's lib. It is well worth investigating.

- Alistair MacDonald

IAN VENABLES

Love Lives Beyond the Tomb

Mary Bevan soprano
Allan Clayton tenor
Carducci String Quartet
Graham J Lloyd piano

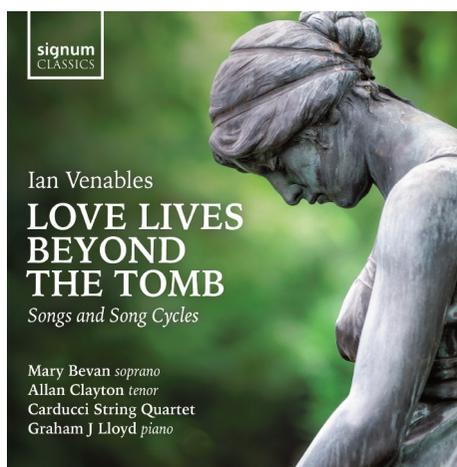
SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD 61

Ian Venables is now recognised as one of the leading song composers of his generation. He continues the tradition established by Gerald Finzi for exquisitely poised settings of poetry which is chosen with great discrimination.

The melodic lines always faithfully contour the poetic rhythm, and there is a Finzi-esque ability to conjour up a telling musical phrase to fit the sentiment.

His piano writing also is highly resourceful, imaginative, and occasionally very dramatic, as though infused by the spirit of an English Rachmaninoff.

It further proves that, given sufficient



skill, there is still much to say in a late tonal idiom which, as well as its debt to Finzi, seems to derive succour from the music of late Holst and Howells.

This is, make no mistake, a superb disc - the third to feature Venables' song repertoire. Cliché alert: it is difficult to imagine this music better sung or played and recorded.

As the very full programme notes mention there is much that is slow and contemplative here, so firstly, I would suggest listening in small doses.

Secondly, to appreciate the full richness of this offering, I recommend reading the poems - and the admirable commentary in the notes - very carefully before and after listening to the music.

The disc opens with six intense love songs for soprano and piano, the verse, as often with Venables, carefully chosen to explore the mysteries of love and loss. This selection is followed a major work, 'Remember This', a cantata for both soprano and tenor with accompaniment from the string quartet and piano.

This is a quite remarkable setting of a longish poem by the former laureate Andrew Motion, celebrating and reflecting on the life of the Queen Mother following her death in 2002.

It comprises eight sections, four of which are sonnets which are interleaved with a narrative that recounts the Queen Mother's journey from death to burial.

The poetry is direct and approachable, and Venables is quoted as saying it chose him 'rather than the other way round'.

The final selection on the disc is for tenor, viola and piano and sets lines written by WW 1 poets. The bosky tone of the viola certainly adds colour to the gloomy sentiments. Sassoon's 'Suicide in the Trenches' is treated to a setting of savage sarcasm, which is in contrast to the general elegiac mood of this group.

- Geoffrey Atkinson

PENELOPE THWAITES

From Five Continents - Choral Music and Songs

Ex Cathedra
Jeffrey Skidmore conductor

SOMMCD 0612

If you have come across Penelope Thwaites before it will probably be as a pianist. She is Australian and has often performed, recorded and promoted contemporary Australian composers, but now it is her turn for a moment in the sun with this, the première CD of her music.

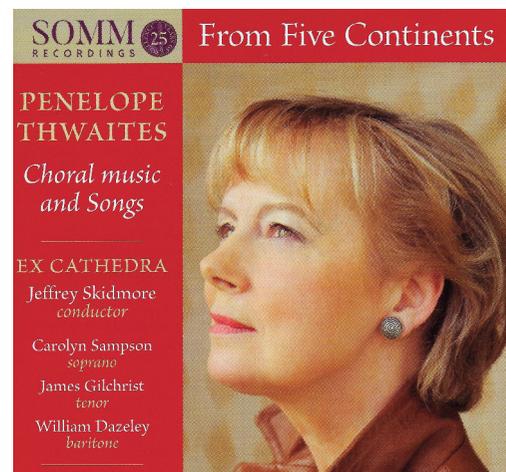
The first four tracks are devoted to choral psalm settings including the well-known Psalm 23 '*The Lord is my Shepherd*', followed by a succinct '*Missa Brevis*' (which means there is no setting of the Creed) written for St. John's Church Canberra.

The disc ends with sacred works such as 'Christmas Songs' with very touching poems by Thwaites herself, and by her father Michael, a setting of '*Lead Kindly Light*' and ending with '*St. Teresa's Bookmark*', which was also set in the 80s by Rubbra.

In between, are three '*Love Songs*' divided between a soprano, baritone and tenor with piano, and '*Five Shakespeare Songs*' for the three soloists, SATB Choir, piano, with the imaginative use of percussion utilizing the most famous of the bard's texts like '*O Mistress Mine*' and '*It was a lover and his lass*'.

Lastly and, especially, interestingly is a piece entitled '*India-Australia-Africa*' very rhythmic settings of three texts in a sort of Radio 2 style, if I may say, for which the various voices are joined by a guitar, piano, percussion and a saxophone, hence the CD covers five continents as indicated by its title.

The composer has been especially fortunate in the performers involved and the intimacy of the recording, all seem to be firmly committed to this music which must



CD REVIEWS

be quite different from their usual repertoire and they are rewarded with some very pleasing melodies and gratifying and sensitive word setting, but, I have to say, not much of this music is especially memorable, none of it will 'frighten the horses', and the style (not that this necessarily matters) is mostly of 50 or 100 years ago with few dissonances or harmonic surprises.

The Shakespeare settings, which I enjoyed the most, have a feeling of the era of Miss Marple about them, and sing of a long lost England (or Australia) a period, which perhaps only exists in the imagination. Incidentally, Jeffrey Skidmore commented to the composer on the Englishness of 'A Carol for Christmas Morning'.

The texts have been clearly provided and Penelope Thwaites writes briefly about the background to the disc and intriguingly on each of the pieces and how they came to be written.

- Gary Higginson

ARNELL & BATE

Violin & Piano

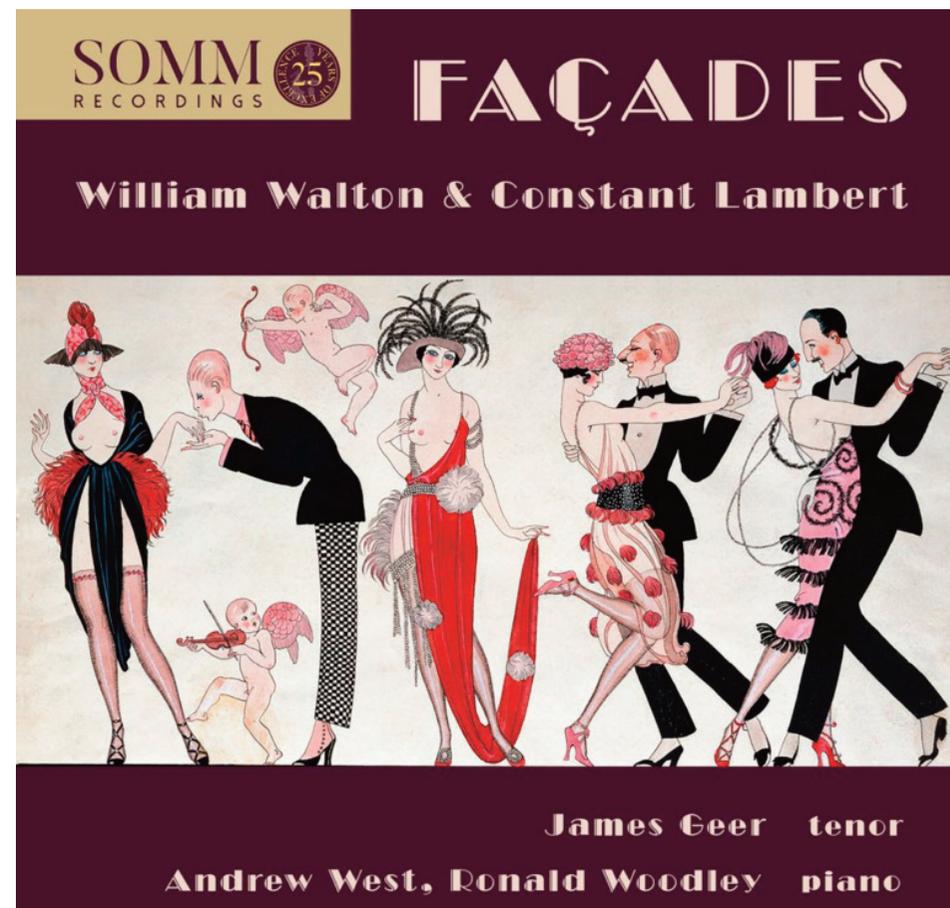
Patrick Wastnage violin
Elizabeth Dunn piano

TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0492

Both these British composers were in New York during the war enjoying early successes with their orchestral pieces taken up by Thomas Beecham in the USA.

Richard Arnell (1917-2009) was a pupil of John Ireland at the RCM from 1935-39. In New York for the World Fair, he was lucky to get a commission from Elizabeth Coolidge to write a violin sonata, composed in summer 1940 on Long Island.

The 1st sonata's opening Allegro, is in a jovial neo-classical mood, nearer to Hindemith than Stravinsky in style, followed by a brief and mysterious, Adagio, which leads to a final Vivace, where the piano is



busy with triplet figuration, while the violin soars above.

The theme for the 'Passacaglia for solo violin' is based on falling thirds in a slow tempo, and develops through several variations, with skilful double stopping to make a satisfying piece.

Returning to London in 1947, Arnell's 2nd violin sonata was premiered in a BBC radio broadcast in February 1950. It opens with a dramatic rising figure of detached chromatic octaves on the piano, to which the violin responds with a calmer and quieter version in legato, and these form the main ingredients of the movement.

The Andante slow movement starts with the calm version of the rising chromatic scale, contrasted with a legato figure of rising and falling thirds.

The final Allegro movement is a skittish Scherzo in triple time, culminating with a decorated violin scale rising three octaves.

'Variations on an American Theme' are a delightful set, but the mystery of the source of the theme seems to have led to various confusions with the dates and the numbering of the track numbers.

Stanley Bate (1911-59) was born in Plymouth, and had written an opera before studying at the RCM with Vaughan Williams, and later with Hindemith. His sonata was written in Brazil in 1946.

The lively opening Allegro leads to a sad

violin melody in the Lento over haunting slow chords for the piano. The Marcia 3rd movement is a lively scherzo with running triplets for the piano.

The final Presto has driving discords on the piano, with a more lyrical central episode.

The playing is full of vitality and conviction and deserves to give a new lease of life to these worthy pieces which were victims of the Glock-Keller austerity regime.

- Richard Carder

FACADES

Walton and Lambert

Andrew West & Ronald Woodley piano
James Geer tenor

SOMMCD 0614

The entertaining charm of this coquettish piano combination is a perfect way to brighten up those lacklustre Lockdown blues.

William Walton's engaging *Façade Suites 1 and 2* are here candidly delivered in a spritely arrangement by Constant Lambert. These engaging, infectious transcriptions for two keyboards, speak for themselves in

no uncertain terms and are delightfully entertaining.

Purists might decide they cannot compare with the classic version featuring the lyrics of the great Edith Sitwell. But the impact of modern audio-engineering and accomplished keyboard and vocal work make this engaging rendition an essential part of any respectable collection.

The fun and impish amusement enjoyed by Messrs West and Woodley bubbles throughout this well-executed release. The bouncy energy of *Polka*, *Tarantella*, *Tango*, *Country Dance*, *Popular Song* and *Fox-Trot* (to name just a few of the intimate performances on this 28-track bonanza) benefits from agile finger-work, thoughtfully balanced piano pedalling and a clear rapport between these skilled four hands.

The sultry, but at the same time gently commanding, voice of tenor, James Geer, successfully brings home songs of a more expressive mode. *The Long-Departed Lover* shows Lambert – himself a notable pianist and 30-years friend of Walton -- at his plaintive composing best and here they benefit from Geer's beautifully-restrained tenor voice, guaranteed to pull on the heart strings.

This attractive release also includes polished versions of Walton's masterpiece, *Siesta*, as well as Lambert's legendary *Four Poems* by Li Po.

This release revels in the music's folksy/jazz roots and excellent sound engineering (wonderfully captured at Potton Hall, Suffolk) brings the deftly played instruments and crisp vocal sound right into the listeners room!

- Chris Bye

GUSTAV HOLST Choral Works

Caritas Chamber Choir
Benedict Preece director

Available online from Caritas Chamber Choir

This disc contains a compilation of part songs, a folk song and carols, brought together to create a varied CD of some of Gustav Holst's lesser-known works for voices. Founded in 2011 the CCC has members from the East Kent area; the group often performs at Canterbury Cathedral.

Mr Preece chose to open the disc with a wonderful note-against-note part-song, *Now rest thee from all care*, demonstrating the choir's truly satisfying balance, diction and phrasing. Like several other works

presented here, Mr Preece has made an engraving from the original manuscript.

The set of *Four Carols*, dating from 1916 to 1918, need to be explored by choirs globally; it includes the familiar *Lullay my liking* and the not-so-familiar *Bring us in good ale*, which showcases brilliantly the men of the choir both in unison and in harmony.

The listener will immediately compare and contrast Holst's *Dives and Lazarus* (1917) with the popular work of RVW but of some 20 years later. In particular, I enjoyed the chord progression Holst uses in the final verse.

The listener will be pleased with Holst's settings of especially *To Sylvia and Come away Death* – part of the set of Five Part Songs composed just prior to 1900; they display solid imitative singing style of the women against that of the men.

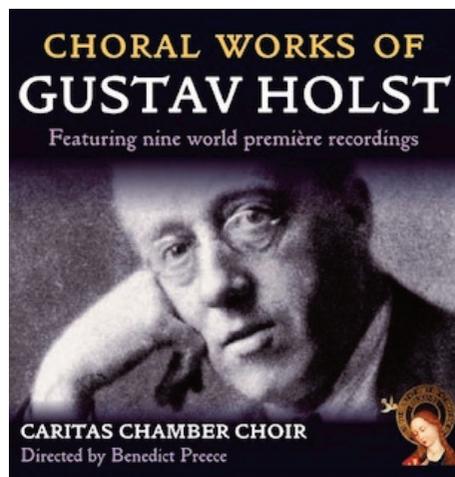
The stand-alone *It was a lover and his lass* is remarkable for its more reflective narrative of the poetry than the more lusty intent style sometimes set; several beautiful chordal structures are brought forward in this primarily note-against-note setting.

The disc concludes with a setting of Thomas Hood's *I love thee*. In similar fashion to *Now rest thee* that opens this recording, the setting highlights the roundness of timbre the CCC has.

Another early work from around 1900 this setting features a wonderful series of chords smoothly moving about in peaceable manner, almost forecasting those used by Walton and Howells.

This is a most welcome disc to acquaint us with Holst's vocal writing less heard today in concert halls or sanctuaries than his large and smaller orchestral works. Many of these pieces given us here by Mr Preece and the CCC have now received world-première recording status.

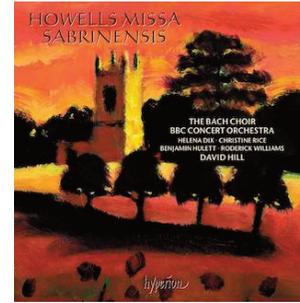
- John Dressler



HOWELLS Missa Sabrinensis

The Bach Choir
BBC Concert Orchestra
David Hill conductor

HYPERION CDA68294



Herbert Howells (1892-1983) like his friend Vaughan Williams, was not a believer, yet he created a

vast amount of religious music for the Anglican church, seeing in the text architecture of 'immemorial prose'.

David Willcocks commissioned the *Missa Sabrinensis* (Mass of the Severn) for the 1954 Worcester Three Choirs Festival.

After its premiere it had few performances until October 1982 when the Bach Choir performed it at the Royal Festival Hall in celebration of Howells's 90th birthday.

Why this should be is a puzzle. It is a challenging work for performers with its complex contrapuntal textures, requiring artists of high calibre and adequate rehearsal time. But it is a masterpiece, one of the great works of 20th century choral music.

Although some portions of the work are reminiscent of Vaughan Williams, Holst and Walton that is only because their works are more familiar. Howells was his own man and there was a reason Bliss in his autobiography described Howells as 'the outstanding talent' of his generation.

In a letter to Walter Emery, Howells described his overall vision, 'Each [movement] builds itself in obedience not only to the text but to the logical sequence of purely musical ideas'.

In this recording Mr Hill and his performers allow us to hear and appreciate Howells' magnificent detail in all its glory.

'The logical sequence of purely musical ideas...' is laid before us as impressive as a medieval cathedral; ornate, intricate and wholly satisfying as a work of art. The recording quality is superb as are all the performers, though Helena Dix stands out in her liquid navigation of the high soprano lines. The disc finishes with a stirring arrangement of Howells hymn tune *Michael*.

- Paul RW Jackson

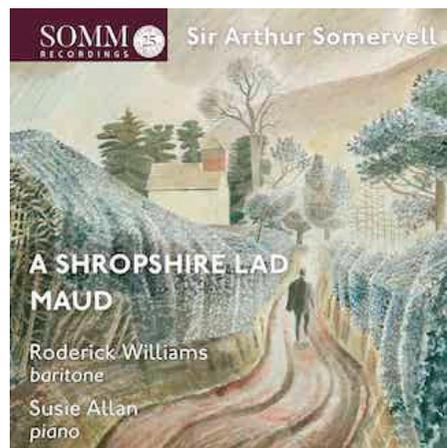
CD REVIEWS

SOMERVELL

A Shropshire Lad & Maud

Roderick Williams baritone
Susie Allan piano

SOMM CD0615



It seems that Arthur Somervell's setting of 10 poems from A.E. Housman's now iconic poems may have been the first to gain permission and approval from the famously curmudgeonly and unmusical poet.

They were written at the time when young men were leaving to fight, and to die, in the far-off Boer war, but are now inextricably linked with the awfulness of World War I.

Dating from 1904 Somervell's *'A Shropshire Lad'* is clearly of its Edwardian era. It is diatonic with no hint of the often pained modality and wounded harmonies found in the younger Butterworth's settings of just a few years later.

Four of the poems were set by both composers including *'Loveliest of Trees'*, which opens both. Somervell singularly fails to plumb the depths of *'On the idle hill of summer'* compared with Butterworth's setting in another cycle.

However Somervell can write a telling melody with expressive harmonic shifts as in *'White in the Moon'*. The cycle is said in Jeremy Dibble's excellent essay to "communicate a narrative of a young man who wistfully contemplates nature, life and love at the age of 20".

'Maud' sets Tennyson, the Victorian poet-laureate, and dates from 1898. Tennyson calls *'Maud'* a monodrama, and it is one of considerable length. Somervell sets 13 of the poems.

The poet is infatuated with a young woman 'not yet seventeen' and fantasises about wanting to be with her, in her garden or in the fields. But this is only after discovering the body of his father who committed suicide and then, at first, hating Maud before becoming obsessed with her.

Roderick Williams, writing in the booklet *'A Singer's Perspective'*, seems to almost apologise for the song-cycle and I have to agree that Somervell seems to be generally deliberately oblivious to the trauma suffered by the poet and to its consequences only occasionally stressing the deeper moods.

These cycles are complemented by two other quite poignant songs *'A Kingdom by the Sea'* (Poe) and with words translated from the German *'Shepherds Cradle Song'*.

These performances have much beauty, empathy and sensitivity. This music may be out of fashion and may be restricted in its emotional depth but it still should have an audience and still provide pleasure and refreshment.

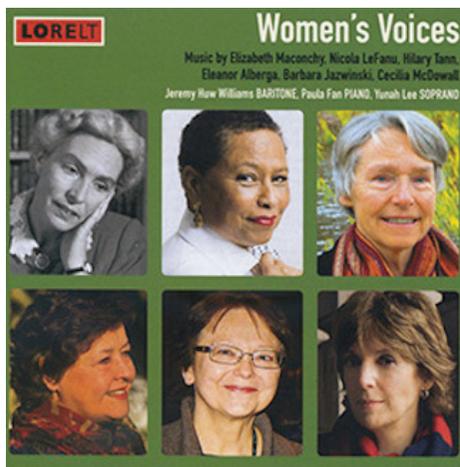
- Gary Higginson

WOMEN'S VOICES

Vocal Music by Women Composers

Jeremy Huw Williams baritone
Paula Fan piano
Lauren Rustad Roth, Timothy Kantor violins
Molly Gebrian viola
Theodore Buchholz cello

LORELT LNT143



This collection of vocal settings by six women composers, is coloured by their musical upbringing in a period in the 20th century, when lavish tonality tended to be frowned on. Actually, none of the music is completely atonal, indeed some is definitely tonal, but stretched to its outer reaches.

Elizabeth Maconchy (1907 – 1994) was inspired by composers like Bartók, Alban Berg and Janáček. Her *'Four Shakespeare Songs'* all feature the 'astringency' mentioned in the accompanying programme note but she still manages very skillfully to mirror and indeed amplify the moods of her very different texts. Compare the brooding darkness of *'Come*

away death' with the electrifying agility of both voice and piano in *'When I was and a little tiny boy'*.

Maconchy's daughter, Nicola LeFanu's piece, *'The Swan'* is described as a 'scena'. Both stunningly imaginative and quite filmic it uses sections of a Latin medieval text and a modern English exposition by Fleur Adcock.

Some of the text is spoken by Jeremy Huw Williams, other sections sung with considerable dramatic ebullience against an expressive piano background.

Welsh composer Hilary Tann sets three poems by Gwyneth Lewis on the story of Saint Melangell who saved a hare being chased by hunters by hiding it beneath her skirts. She uses a quartet of strings, as backing. Soprano Yunah Lee is used in some respects like an extra instrument. The music is more tonal in its expression.

More tonal still are the four poems set by Jamaican born composer Eleanor Alberga based on colourful pictorial texts.

'A Girl by the Ocean' by Barbara Jazwinski sets a poem by her daughter Maria. It is dramatic, and very much on the modern side.

Cecilia McDowall's settings of three poems by Dylan Thomas, though still modern, are the closest to more tonal music, possibly the most instantly appealing music on the CD. The others need repeated listening demonstrating the difference between popular and classical music. Listen to popular music and it is the same each time you hear it. With modern classical music, each listening reveals something new and often impressive.

- Alan Cooper

RUBBRA, BLISS & BAX

The Romantic Piano Concerto Vol 81

The Orchestra Now
Leon Botstein conductor
Piers Lane piano

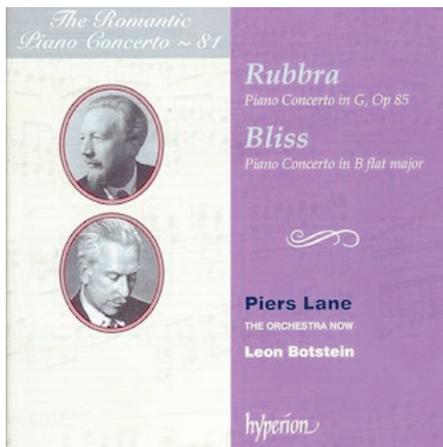
HYPERION CDA68297

I have wondered for years why Rubbra's Piano Concerto has not been recorded since 1956 when Denis Matthews was the soloist under Sargent.

I suspected that it would eventually appear in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series and here it is in a highly desirable coupling with Rubbra's friend and colleague Arthur Bliss. There is also a short work by Bax who had preceded Bliss as Master of the Kings's Musik.

Rubbra was a fine pianist and his concerto, written when he was at the height of his powers and popularity, is dedicated 'in

CD REVIEWS



homage' to the Pakistani musician, Ali Akbar Khan. The latter played a 'sord', which Rubbra described as "a complex Indian string instrument".

Rubbra was fascinated with Asian music for much of his life. He heard Khan play and he loved the way 'he felt his way into the improvisation'; here the first movement does just that.

But this arch-shaped movement is entitled '*Corymbus*'. Rubbra explained to me that he had taken a strong interest in Botany whilst living on the Chilterns, and that this word describes a 'cluster of blossoms whose stalks of the lower flowers are longer than those of the upper'. He drew the shape for me in my miniature score. Musically, ideas are stated then they flower and enlarge.

The middle movement is called '*Dialogue*', proving that this concerto is not a typical Romantic, confrontational work but one in which the material is evenly divided, almost spiritually, between the soloist and orchestra.

The bumptious finale, a '*Danza alla Rondo*' has a cadenza towards the end which quotes from the earlier two movements but its slightly menacing atmosphere might be explained by another, curious quotation in the score, from Dante's '*Inferno*', which translates as 'Speak not to them (the damned) but look and pass'. In this work Piers Lane is at one with the work's transcendent qualities.

Bliss's longer concerto is more in the Romantic tradition. It is in three movements with the last having an andante maestoso introduction before launching into a tarantella-like *molto vivo*. This is a bravura concerto as witnessed right from the start with its towering double octaves from the piano which even scared the great Solomon for whom it was written.

The British Council commissioned it for a first performance in America under Boult, and Bliss, who, having American relatives and also being a man to produce music for the grand occasion, was the ideal composer for the job. Piers Lane is as much in tune with the virtuosity as he is to the work's

romantic qualities. He is supported by the strong sympathies of Leon Botstein and the orchestra.

In between the concerti is one of Bax's late works, one of his shortest and sunniest, '*Maytime in Sussex*', the county which became his home after the Second World War.

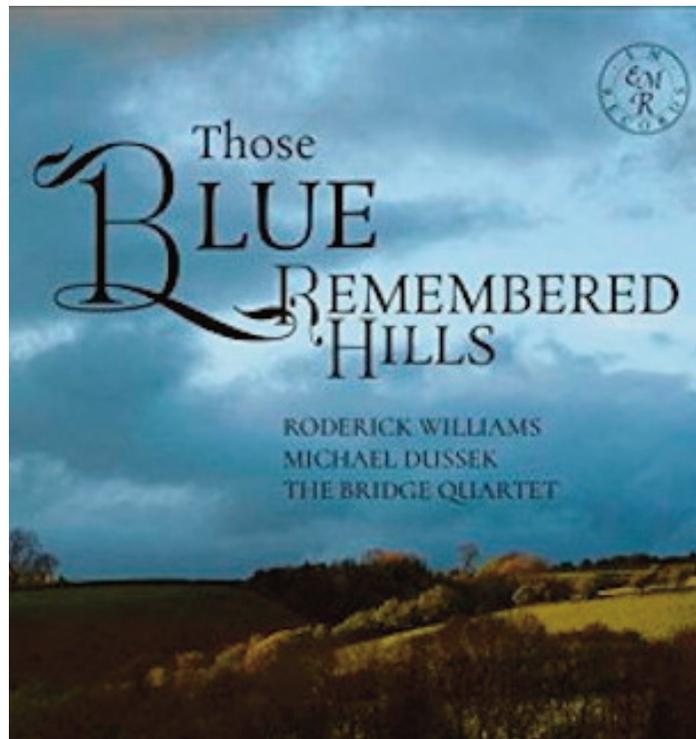
Throughout the disc Lane, Botstein and the orchestra play with fervour and total understanding. I like their sometimes more relaxed tempi and the essence of the best of British music is captured to perfection.

- Gary Higginson

GURNEY & HOWELLS Those Blue Remembered Hills

The Bridge Quartet
Roderick Williams baritone
Michael Dussek piano

EM RECORDS EM-065



One is struck from the start of Ivor Gurney's '*The Western Playland*' by the clarity and musicianship of diction and phrasing displayed by Mr Williams; this proves to hold across the entire disc.

Written for baritone, string quartet and piano, this work is realized with terrific balance throughout among singer, pianist and ensemble. The dialogue nature of the 8-poem cycle setting is stunningly rendered to the listener by all the performers highlighting every aspect of imagery and meaning in the poetry.

There are a few glimpses of RVW's styling here and there, no doubt inherent in Gurney's own setting of Housman's poems which those of RVW had so inspired him to examine more of A.E.H.'s output.

There are plenty of moments of exquisite lyricism as well as intensity for the listener to enjoy and appreciate. The four selected songs of Herbert Howells also included on this disc (*There was a Maiden, Girl's Song, King David* and *The Mugger's Song*) include several delightfully bouncy sections juxtaposed with moments more dark and powerful in nature.

These provide a wonderful microcosm of Howells' vocal writing. Known better for his choral works, these songs were composed at the end of his time at the Royal College of Music.

The terrific timbre and unanimity of phrasing and articulation of the Bridge Quartet is showcased within a marvellous interpretation of Gurney's '*String Quartet in D Minor*' completed in 1925.

This four-movement chamber music gem illustrates Gurney's adeptness at high-quality and ingenious instrumental composition that one might not expect from a composer so much more known for being a song craftsman.

In this work Gurney pays homage to the Romantic-era string writing similar to that of Beethoven along with Gurney's own characteristic melodic construction throughout.

All the typical late nineteenth-century instrumental elements such as sonata form, cyclic use of material from movement to movement, contrasting textures, off- as well as on-beat jagged rhythmic figures are here all

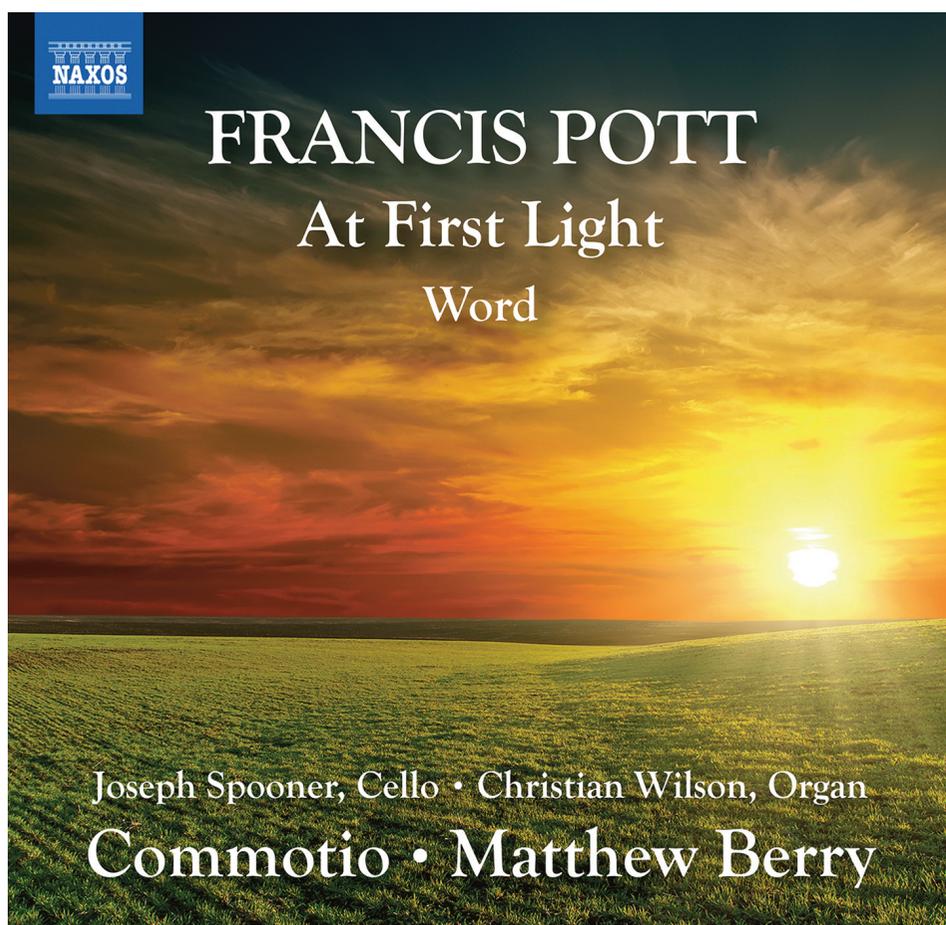
expertly presented by the Bridge Quartet.

This disc focuses on the various shapes, moods and degrees of colour change the listener will associate with English chamber music of the period.

There is a wonderful and satisfying selection here of Gurney's huge output, much of which remains in manuscript at the Gloucestershire Archives for performers and editors to explore.

- John Dressler

CD REVIEWS



FRANCIS POTT At First Light & Word

Commotio Chamber Choir
Matthew Berry conductor

NAXOS 8.573976

Two attractively tonal yet modern choral compositions by Francis Pott (b. 1957) are brought together in these world première recordings.

'At First Light', commissioned by Eric Bruskin of Philadelphia USA, is related to the idea of a Requiem in memory of Bruskin's late mother (although in his detailed programme note Pott writes that it is not really a Requiem as such).

Several Latin texts including 'Requiem aeternam' are set along with English poetry by Thomas Blackburn, the Welsh poet Alun Lewis, Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran and the American Wendell Berry. Bruskin's own Jewish faith is represented by his own English translation of the Hebrew Liturgy of Internment.

I mention this because I feel it is somehow reflected in the impassioned free-soaring music for solo cello, which is at times reminiscent of the singing of a Jewish Cantor. The piece opens with the solo cello played vehemently by Joseph Spooner. When, after a while, he is joined by the chorus, it sounded to me almost like an

orchestral accompaniment. Soon however, the choir assumes centre stage, and in the central Latin Hymn of Praise, 'Laudibus in sanctis', an electrifyingly complex Scherzo-like choral passage, the cello is absent.

The Latin texts express the universality of the Requiem but the English texts express depths of feeling on a more personal level, heightened by Pott's choral writing, particularly where he brings in solo voices from the chamber choir. Overall, this is a carefully thought out and complex work that is rather moving.

The second piece 'Word' was commissioned by the Reverend Dr Nicholas Fisher who provided the choice of texts, interspersing sections of the prelude to the Gospel of St John with the poetry of R. S. Thomas. The work explores the more mystical side of the search for belief.

The choral writing, expressed in the marvellously clean, well balanced and clear singing of the Oxford based chamber choir Commotio, is augmented by alluring organ playing from Christian Wilson, whether in accompaniments for the chorus or in solo passages, sometimes rich and lavish but with delightful moments of outstanding delicacy too. It was that which particularly impressed me.

Perhaps Pott could expand this

organ music into something like a Fantasia for solo organ?

- Alan Cooper

HERBERT HOWELLS Piano Music 1

Matthew Schellhorn piano

NAXOS 8.571382

This disc is a welcome issue from the collaboration of the BMS and Naxos, and therefore available at a modest price, yet with no compromise on quality of recording and performance – Mr Schellhorn is clearly a very fine pianist.

The 21 tracks on the disc concentrate mainly on relatively early and late works. The early works evince a fine compositional technique, with passages, in some pieces, of rapid filigree work which recall the styles of Rachmaninov and Ravel, and, in others, the added-note harmony of Debussy.

The main item in this group is the seven movements of '*Summer Idylls*', pleasant enough music to be sure, though one's 'innocent ear' would, understandably perhaps, be unlikely to identify the composer.

Howells devotees will doubtless be familiar with Lambert's Clavichord of 1927 and Howells' Clavichord of 1961.

The much stronger material in the *Siciliana* of 1958 and the *Pavane* and *Galliard* of 1964 exult in the style of the later collection. These pieces are absolutely splendid.

I am most reassured by Jonathan Clinch's comment in the liner notes which states that Howells always played these pieces on the piano. Frankly it is absurd to think that the clavichord with its tiny tone would be adequate. In the final group of pieces, the '*Petrus Suite*', the idiom has



become rather more spare and emotionally restrained, in line with Howells' late idiom.

The alert will notice the 'r' in the disc title, so it is hoped that further explorations of this composer's piano music will become available.

However admirable the preceding may be, there is an issue which I find troubling. This is based on the possibly quaint idea that pianists might wish to play at least some of the simpler music featured here themselves. For a start, there is no information as to the sources of the music. Novello is stated as the publisher, but none of the items here appear to be listed, even as archive.

If you refer to the HH Society website, which is the obvious step, the list of his works is behind a paywall – ie you have to join the society, which is irritating, old-fashioned and counterproductive. The websites of, for instance, Ronald Stevenson and Robin Milford, are admirable examples of how to do it.

Further, in this 21st century, computer typesetting and print-to-order means that items of niche interest may be made easily and cheaply sourced, and indeed would provide an additional supply of funds for the society.

- Geoffrey Atkinson

HUBERT PARRY Songs of Farewell Works by Stanford, Gray & Wood

The Choir of Westminster Abbey
James O'Donnell conductor

HYPERION CDA68301

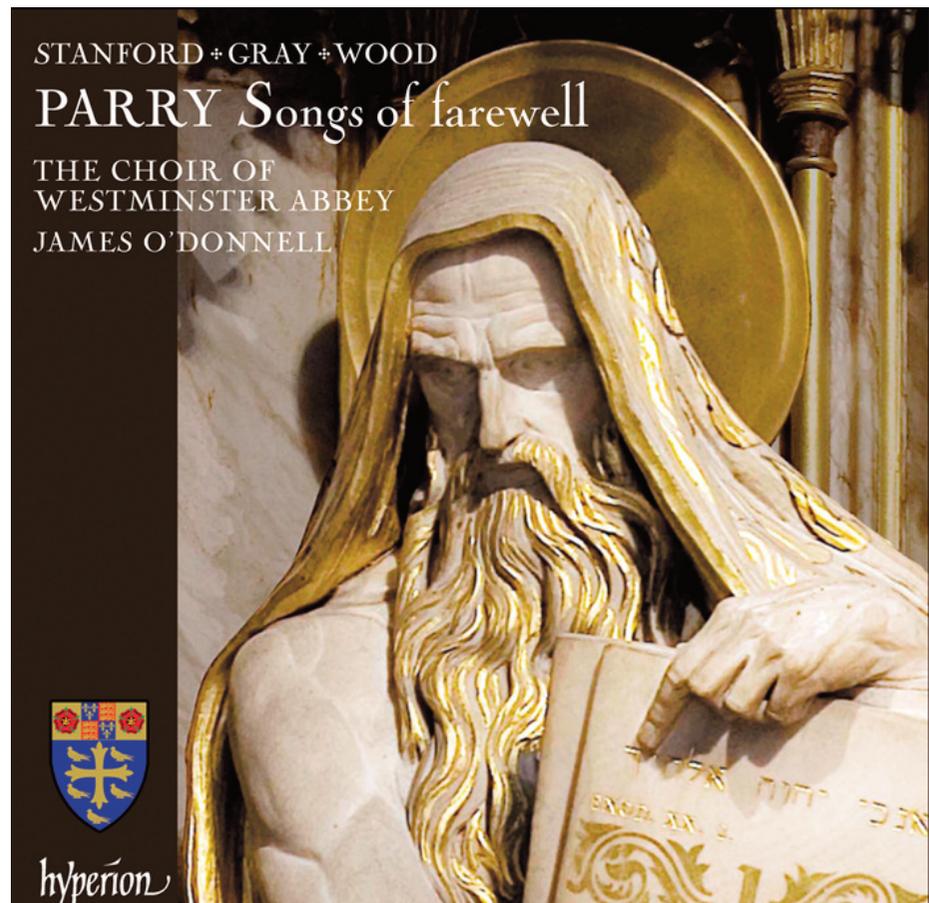
The programme of this imaginatively planned CD is enhanced by music making of the highest order.

From the magical opening – Stanford's Three Motets Op 38, by way of canticle settings by Alan Gray and Charles Wood, lead to Sir Hubert Parry's magnificent *Songs of Farewell* where is evoked an atmosphere of peace and tranquility that imbues the whole disc.

The gentle finality of the musical style is beautifully caught by the Westminster Abbey Choir in the experienced hands of James O'Donnell their director of music.

Following the *Stanford Motets* there comes a worthy companion – a fine setting of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis in F Minor* by Alan Gray, Stanford's successor as organist of Trinity College Cambridge.

Like the other pieces on this disc it is



arranged in multi-parts. Gray's music handles the textures in a thoroughly Stanfordian manner with a Gloria set with a confident response to this familiar text.

The *Nunc Dimittis* provides a complementary contrast with a tender and atmospheric mood in evidence.

Stanford now makes a second appearance in the programme with his superb neo-Bachian setting of the Latin *Magnificat*. This fine work was composed for R.R. Terry the organist of Westminster Cathedral.

James O'Donnell was formally the organist and choirmaster of the cathedral and hence knows the repertoire well.

A second setting of the *Nunc Dimittis* follows by the Irishman Charles Wood demonstrating this underrated composer's interest in plainsong and the contrapuntal textures of the Renaissance.

The most substantial pieces on this disc are Parry's magnificent cycle of *Six Motets* composed between 1914 and 1915.

Technically demanding, each piece is delivered with sensitivity and (where appropriate) panache by the abbey choir with James O'Donnell completely at home in the style and idiom of the music.

These are particularly well-judged and controlled performances, which are well-nigh faultless.

- Alistair MacDonald

IAN VENABLES Requiem

Gloucester Cathedral Choir
Adrian Partington director

SOMMCD 0618

A major work from Ian Venables is always most welcome, but a masterpiece like this leaves me almost speechless. Having played the CD twice, I bought the score which very much helped to reveal some of the skill and intricacies in the evolution and construction of this work.

Venables states that when the idea of a commission to compose a full Requiem was suggested, he felt it would be 'too daunting a creative challenge', but he did agree to compose a short work memorial work for a funeral service.

This was a setting, as an introit, of the '*Requiem Aeternum*' text, (recorded on SOMM 0187). This had the unexpected effect of firing him up with an 'overwhelming desire' to set the whole thing, which quickly turned into an 18 month compositional odyssey.

Op 48 may be a fortunate omen. Fauré's much loved work also bore this magic number. However, the style is much more reminiscent of Duruflé's Op 9 although the melodic lines are modal rather than derived

CD REVIEWS

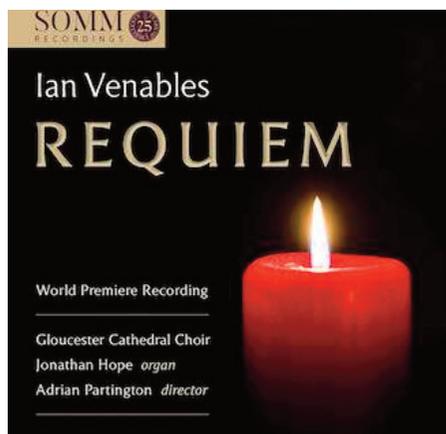
from plainsong. The harmonies are iatonic with various degrees of dissonance, some quite strong, some achingly beautiful.

Venables makes his own compilation of the texts. There is a *'Pie Jesu'*, but for choir after a short solo. The *'Dies Irae'* scares rather than terrorises the listener, but most strikingly, there is no *'In Paradisum'*.

Rather the conclusion is the *'Lux aeterna'* because the text has 'a transcendental resonance, one that connects our inner world with the spiritual world that lies beyond the veil.'

Thus, the work ends 'in a mood of radiant optimism', rather than the Faure's resigned scepticism or Durufle's perfumed tranquility.

Listening with the score, the subtlety with which two extraordinarily simple organ and choir motifs are woven into subsequent passages is more evident. Ian says the *'Libera me'* 'proved to be the biggest creative challenge' in which case I would suggest it became his 'biggest' success.



I loved coming across the directions 'spaventato' (fearful) and 'minnacciando' (menacing) in the approach to the *'Dies Irae'* which is set as a sinister march (the outline deriving from the second of the original motifs). This leads to a spectacular dissonance which slowly unwinds to an unsettled pianissimo.

The performance is exemplary. Sopranos and altos (boys and girls) are absolutely rock-solid and pure in tone but the men sometimes sound a bit woolly.

That may be a consequence of a difficult acoustic. I also noted that the pedal part from the organ could have had more definition (and my set-up does include a sub-woofer).

There are four additional anthems on the disc, but you would want to hear these on a different occasion than the Requiem which, as you may gather, I have found overwhelming.

- Geoffrey Atkinson

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS & FINZI

Philharmonia Orchestra
Michael Collins conductor / solo clarinet

BIS (BIS 2367)

Britain's eminent clarinettist, Michael Collins, makes a spectacular impression in his debut as a sublimely controlled symphonic conductor.

He coaxes the very best from Ralph Vaughan Williams' divine Fifth symphony. This performance ranks with the very best of

recordings over recent decades.

A finely structured interpretation literally bursts on the music scene as a real ear-opener, sitting comfortably among the 30-plus different recordings made since its premiere in war-torn 1943 with immediate success. Past masterful interpreters have included Boult, Barbirolli, Menuhin, Previn, Haitink, Hickox, Elder and Manze.

Without any doubt, Collins can join this pre-eminent list.

Collins' carefully nursed emotive sweeps are superbly controlled with an admirable discipline which adds considerable weight to those ever-so popular goose-pimpling moments. Philharmonia strings and smooth brass embellish those atypical RVW melodies and harmonies, which sweetly teem from this symphonic masterpiece.

A sprightly woodwind section – yes, including two clarinets! – also make their telling mark. This pastoral work oozes a definitive calmness that will help us all face

down the ugliest of difficulties. Indeed, this version seems to encapsulate that lovely adage: "Music is the medicine of the mind!"

RVW (1872-1958) and the lesser-known, Gerald Finzi (1901-1956), were two of Britain's eminent 20th century composers who

knew how to use orchestral timbre to engender intense emotional sounds. Collins' tender version of the Finzi Clarinet Concerto makes a perfect stablemate.

An arresting forte string opening melts away into the seductive sway of the mellow-moody clarinet, which goes on to flourish with hypnotic themes throughout this irresistible Finzi concerto.

Collins' distinctive and articulate clarinet playing captures a satisfying nimbleness, sharply contrasting with those elongated phrases, particularly in the plaintive adagio. A crisp, well-engineered, release that makes a definite antidote to those Covid blues.

- Chris Bye



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