

Guildford Borough Council
Concerts 1977/78

West Gallery B £1

N^o 83

Guildford
Philharmonic
Orchestra

SATURDAY 4th MARCH 1978
at 7.30 p.m.

**GUILDFORD
CATHEDRAL**

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Dean and Chapter)

**Guildford
Philharmonic
Orchestra**

PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

MERYL DROWER

ROBIN LEGGATE

Conductor:

VERNON HANDLEY

This performance is promoted by Guildford Borough Council with financial assistance from the South East Arts Association.

Meryl Drower

Meryl Drower was born in Wales in 1951. At the age of seventeen she won a Foundation Scholarship to the Royal College of Music, where she studied singing with Meriel St. Clair. While at college she won a number of prizes including the Leslie Woodgate Prize for oratorio, the Major Van Someren-Godfrey Prize for English Song, the Harry Evans Award, the Cuthbert-Smith Award and the Agnes Nicholls Harty Trophy in addition to obtaining her A.R.C.M. On leaving the College she won the Royal Society of Arts Scholarship for study abroad.

Miss Drower has toured Wales and Northern Europe as a soloist with the Welsh National Youth Orchestra. She is now a concert artist of great prowess and appears with choral societies and at major festivals throughout the country. She is also heard with increasing regularity in the London concert halls and appears this year in a variety of programmes on London's South Bank. Her first record "William Sterndale Bennett Songs", has recently been released.

Her early operatic work included appearances with Phoenix Opera as Polly in "The Beggar's Opera", given on tour in Yugoslavia and Austria, and also performed in London. In 1975 she made her major operatic debut in this country as Gilda in Jonathan Miller's production of "Rigoletto" for Kent Opera. She is now a member of Colin Graham's English Music Theatre Company, with whom she has sung Clorinda in "La Cenerentola" and Serpetta in Mozart's "La Finta Giardiniera". Last year her work with the Company included Miss Wordsworth in the revival of "Albert Herring".

Meryl Drower appeared with Vernon Handley, the Guildford Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra in 1976 in a performance of Bach's "St. John Passion".

Robin Leggate

Winner of the 1975 Tauber Competition, Robin Leggate was born in West Kirby, Cheshire and was a Choral Bursar at Queen's College Oxford from 1964-67. In 1973 he went to the Royal Northern College of Music as a post graduate student. In 1974 he sang Nicias in the College production of Thais and was subsequently invited to sing in the premiere of Alan Bush's Wat Tyler at Sadler's Wells Theatre in which, at very short notice, he sang the major role of King Richard II.

In January 1976 Robin Leggate became a

member of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden and made his debut in February 1977 singing Cassio in *Otello* under Zubin Mehta. In May 1967 he sang Tomino in *The Magic Flute* with the Israel Philharmonic, a role he had already sung earlier in the season with Kent Opera. In July 1976 he made his debut with the Glyndebourne Festival and in September that year made his debut with the English National Opera singing Nero in *The Coronation of Poppea*.

Robin Leggate has sung concerts throughout the United Kingdom and in October 1975 made his debut on the Continent with two performances of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in Belgium. In January 1976 he made his Royal Festival Hall debut with the London Symphony Orchestra singing Stravinsky's *Pulcinella Suite*. He has since appeared in important concerts with the Huddersfield Choral Society, sung frequently in Ireland and given a lieder recital at the Wigmore Hall.

Four Sea Interludes from "Peter Grimes"

Britten 1913-1976

**Dawn
Sunday Morning
Moonlight
Storm**

"Peter Grimes", which was composed in 1944/45, is held by many to be Britten's best Opera. It is a very dramatic piece and certainly very successful in capturing the atmosphere of a small fishing town and the town's relationship with the hardest of protagonists, the sea. Sea Interludes are played before or between the scenes into which they lead without a break.

"Dawn" is based on three short themes: a bleak tune for violins and flute, surely suggesting the cold morning breezes and the cries of sea birds; harp and clarinet runs, and quiet brass clashes. It is a masterly piece of musical illustration and one can read all sorts of sea pictures into it: the slow swell of the waves and the receding of water down the beach.

"Sunday Morning", which is the prelude to Act II, suggests a very bright day. The horns, in thirds, begin with forte piano chords, which are followed by a syncopated staccato woodwind theme. When the strings have stated this sparkling tune, a broad melody from the violas and 'cello takes over. This tune it is that works up to a brilliant statement of the woodwind

theme on the trumpets, and the whole noise is suddenly cut into by the deep note of the church bell.

"Moonlight", the Interlude before Act III, suggests a very calm and still atmosphere, with the lower strings and wind setting a background of rising and falling chords, against which occasional flashes of light are represented by octave drops in the flutes and harp.

"Storm", is built on the opening two bar figure which recurs frequently throughout the piece. The orchestra throws this figure about impetuously until the turmoil suddenly dies down and there is a quiet lull followed by a strange staccato passage. This is repeated, and then the fury of the storm returns to bring the Interlude to its violent close.

In these four pieces Britten is concerned mainly with effects, although the music of them is used elsewhere in the Opera. His brilliance and atmospheric illustration is nowhere better than in these Interludes.

Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis Vaughan Williams 1872-1958

Thomas Tallis (about 1505-1585) was a "Gentleman of the Royal Chapel" under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I. Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia* is based on material from the third of eight tunes that Tallis wrote in 1567 for the metrical psalter of Mathew Parker, the then Archbishop of Canterbury. "*Fantasia*" has come to mean something quite different from the form that was popular in the time of Tallis, and which was undoubtedly in Vaughan Williams's mind when he wrote this work, and although the word carried the idea of fancy, it did not necessarily mean something uncontrolled in form. Vaughan Williams's work does not contain a single bar that is not directly related to the material he chose. The work is laid out for a solo string quartet and two string orchestras, the second much smaller than the first (it becomes a sort of echo) and directed to be placed some distance from the orchestra. The whole group is subject to a great deal of divisi writing, and the two orchestras are variously subdivided antiphonally as the work proceeds. The work begins with a setting of the scene harmonically on long held quiet chords. Then the theme is played pizzicato; the first orchestra takes up the tune, and the *Fantasia* begins to unfold.

Another phrase of the tune receives treatment on the solo quartet, and the different phrases are brought together in a huge climax, which shows Vaughan Williams's understanding of the string medium. Indeed, it is as much because of the writing for strings in this work, as for the worth of the material itself, that the piece has been such a success, for it is another example of an English composer writing magnificently for string orchestra, and takes its place beside the Elgar "Introduction and Allegro" as one of the most remarkable string works in the literature. That these two works must, in some sense, have inspired Bliss's "Music for Strings" and Tippett's "Concerto for Double String Orchestra" is certain.

INTERVAL

Hymnus Paradisi **Herbert Howells b.1892**

"Hymnus Paradisi" is a six-movement work for Soprano and Tenor soli, mixed-voice Chorus, and Orchestra.

Four of the choral movements (II to V) are settings of Latin and English texts. These are drawn from the Psalms, the "Missa pro defunctis", and the Book of Common Prayer, and are the immemorial reflections upon the transient griefs and indestructible hopes of mankind. All are appropriate to the mood and purpose of a Requiem. Movement VI is a setting of lines from the Salisbury Diurnal, used here in the translation by Dr. G. H. Palmer appearing at the end of Robert Bridge's Anthology, "The Spirit of Man".

It is clear, therefore, that the work is not strictly a Requiem; equally clear, that the essential nature of such is preserved throughout.

This work springs directly from a Mediaeval poem by Prudentius – "Hymnus circa exsequies defuncti" – that opens with the lines

"Nunc suscipe, terra, fovendum,
Gremioque hunc concipe molli".

These lines now appear in the dedication of "Hymnus Paradisi" to the memory of the composer's only son, Michael Kendrick Howells, whose untimely death turned the composer's mind to the Prudentius poem. There is, in fact, a kindred and earlier work related to "Hymnus Paradisi". When "Hymnus Paradisi" was first heard at Gloucester Three Choirs Festival (September 1950) under the direction of the composer, a programme note of his referred to that first unaccompanied version. The note

stated that in the new choral-orchestral version he sought retention of the mood and temper of the Prudentius poem and of much of the thematic and harmonic thought of the setting: but the poem itself is excluded from the present work.

"Hymnus Paradisi" is best regarded as two-fold.

Part One (movements I, II and III) is continuous. In general this part is contemplative, but not wholly so. There are moments of intense feeling even in the brief concentrated Prelude (I) as well as in the choral "Requiem aeternam dona eis" (II) to which that Prelude is linked. And the twenty-third Psalm (III) is itself touched by the brooding, darker colours of the orchestral Prelude. The last-named presents three or four brief themes that have place, under many variants, in all the succeeding movements (except (V)).

Part Two (movements IV, V, VI) comprises three separate sections. These – especially IV and VI – mark a new level in the work: one that is more dynamic, higher-charged, further-ranging. The rhythmic drive of the middle phrases of "I will lift up mine eyes" and the gradual subjugation of the hundred-and-twenty-first Psalm by the "Sanctus" (in IV, at the first major climax of the "Hymnus") are the chief factors in the changed mood of the work. This simultaneous setting of a double text (one English, the other Latin) is a point of departure, at which the work turns for a time away from its initial brooding contemplation and takes on an almost defiant activity. In movement IV (a union of Psalm 121 and the "Sanctus") there is a constantly increasing heightening of colour. The semi-chorus, the two soloists, and the main chorus all move towards a climax in which the Sanctus for a time supersedes the Psalm. And the long quiet stretches in which the Psalm is again taken up and completed do not essentially diminish the new luminous quality of the choral and orchestral texture.

The fifth movement ("I heard a voice") is a temporary easing of tension and elimination of complexities. Placed between two big movements (IV and VI) its restraint and quiet give it the character of an Interlude. In the scheme of the work it is, in function, a tranquil preparation for the final section that follows.

The sixth and last movement is as a gradual on-coming of "the true light" and "radiance" that will issue in the "unfailing splendour" of those who have "endured in the heat of the conflict".

It is as if personal grief, itself spent, is merged and lost in a general pervasive light and warmth of consolation. To the translated text from the Salisbury Diurnal, the composer has added a series of "Alleluias". These finally prepare and launch the climax of the "unfailing splendour wherein they rejoice with gladness evermore".

Thereafter a return to the immemorial
"Requiem aeternam,
Requiem dona eis sempiternam"
is both retrospect and ending, in terms of complete tranquility.

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Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra