



PROGRAMME

Guildford Philharmonic Choir

MIDSUMMER MUSIC

Saturday 21 June 1997

at 7.30 pm

Holy Trinity Church, Guildford

Gershwin

Highlights from *Porgy and Bess*

Lambert

The Rio Grande

Vaughan Williams

English Folk Songs

Pianos *Jeremy Filsell & Francis Potts*

Conductor *Jeremy Backhouse*

GUILDFORD PHILHARMONIC CHOIR
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, GUILDFORD

SATURDAY 21 JUNE 1997

PROGRAMME

Five English Folk Songs

Ralph Vaughan Williams
1872-1958

- i) The Dark Eyed Sailor
- ii) The Spring-time of the Year
- iii) Just as the Tide was Flowing
- iv) The Lover's Ghost
- v) Wassail Song

Fiesta

Lionel Sainsbury
b. 1958

The Rio Grande

Constant Lambert
1905-1951

INTERVAL

of about 15 minutes

Porgy and Bess

Concert Version by Robert Russell Bennett

George Gershwin
1898-1937

Zoë Peate soprano
Jeremy Finch baritone

Jeremy Filsell piano
Francis Pott piano

GUILDFORD PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

conducted by
JEREMY BACKHOUSE

Vaughan Williams: Five English Folk Songs

- i) The Dark Eyed Sailor
- ii) The Spring-time of the Year
- iii) Just as the Tide was Flowing
- iv) The Lover's Ghost
- v) Wassail Song

Written and published in 1913, these five arrangements are widely regarded as the choral culmination of Vaughan Williams' lifelong involvement with the folk song. The Folk Song Society (as it was known at its inception in 1898) had recruited Vaughan Williams as a member in 1904 and he threw himself enthusiastically into the task of collecting and collating material. He studied and thoroughly absorbed the music, and, with the help of Cecil Sharp (a leading light in the folk song movement) and others, published annotations of sixty-one folk songs in the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* (Vol. II, Part 3). Inevitably, the folk song style began increasingly to influence his own compositional output, in particular the freedom of tonality and melodic idiom. The "folky" tag that accompanied Vaughan Williams was one of which he was proud, not embarrassed.

The arrangements of the Five Folk Songs are elaborate and free in the treatment of each tune. This reflected the composer's own distinctive view on each tune: "There is no original version of any particular tune ... in one sense any particular tune is as old as the beginning of music; in another sense it is born afresh with the singer of today who sang it". In these arrangements, the composer and, more especially, the choir become the "singer of today".

Lionel Sainsbury: Fiesta

Lionel Sainsbury was born in Wiltshire in 1958. After winning the major prizes for composition at the Guildhall School of Music he was awarded the prestigious Mendelssohn Scholarship at the age of 21. Since then his reputation has spread steadily, with his music drawing highly enthusiastic acclaim from audiences up and down the country and also in Europe and the Far East. In 1995 Lorraine McAslan gave the first broadcast performance of his Violin Concerto on BBC Radio 3 with the BBC Concert Orchestra under Barry Wordsworth, and in 1996 the premiere of his South American Suite was given by the pianist Jack Gibbons. Other performers who have recently programmed his music include Tasmin Little and Piers Lane, Claire and Antoinette Cann, and the English String Orchestra conducted by William Boughton. Lionel's Twelve Preludes for piano have been featured in his own performance on Classic FM, and in 1996 Jeremy Filsell gave a number of performances of these pieces, prompting one reviewer to write: "a voyage of discovery for the audience ... and important contribution to the instrument's repertoire, and a splendid highlight to the evening".

Fiesta for two pianos is a vivid and colourful piece featuring virtuoso writing for both players. Following recent performances by Francis Pott and Jeremy Filsell it was described as "displaying wit and ingenuity in its kaleidoscopic dance rhythms", and has been hailed in *Musique et Concerts* (Paris) as "a future two-piano classic".

Constant Lambert: *The Rio Grande* (1927)

Lambert's life presents a cautionary tale of one to whom many things, including great early success, came too easily, and whose career ended prematurely in broken relationships, troubled alcoholism and the bitter awareness of wasting himself, in more senses than one.

The early success in question was *The Rio Grande*, written with astounding audacity and assurance at the age of 23. The sensation it caused can best be understood in two ways: firstly, it landed like a bombshell on a compositional scene still cautiously edging towards a national identity through assimilation of folk song. This was only four years on from the death of the tyrannical Stanford (just as well, in view of his likely comments). The effect of exhilarating emancipation, and of masterly union between jazz and a sort of wicked extension of the time-honoured Oratorio tradition, must have been like a sort of huge aesthetic raspberry - which sums up much (not all) of Lambert himself. It also points to the flavour of the times: facetious, nonchalant, hungry for the exotic, yet ultimately very self-conscious.

Secondly, one should consider the text. There once existed, wrote Lambert in a letter: "... a French translation by myself, which makes considerably more sense than the original English, if I may say so". But Sacheverell, widely esteemed the most original of the three Sitwells, was later to raise travel writing to an almost poetic art form (on a level, say, with the books of Patrick Leigh Fermor). Travel was, by our standards, startlingly cheap - certainly available to the only modestly gilded of Bloomsbury: the likes of Lambert, Cyril Connolly, the Sitwells, Lord Berners (he seriously rich, admittedly) or Peter Quennell seem to have drifted serenely between Naples, the South of France, Amalfi, Toledo and other parts of Italy and Spain. Lambert and Sitwell were thus in a position to purvey to the masses a credible escapism rooted in the real experience. No wonder, perhaps, that headlines after *The Rio Grande* premiere screamed "Queen's Hall in a Frenzy!"

For *The Rio Grande* Sitwell used his magpie imagination to transplant direct experience of Latin Europe to South America. The setting is a busy seaport on carnival day. Although Brazil is mentioned, the sense of hazy location is deliberate: we catch the whiff of the banana republic, with even a hint of New Orleans/Mardi Gras from the North; all this knowingly stuffed with journalistic icons of sheer foreign-ness. There is no intrinsic reason for the jazz element which Lambert introduced: the poem is simply a convenient vehicle. In Richard Shead's excellent Lambert biography the pianist Angus Morrison is quoted thus: "It was always Constant's idea that the solo piano should be like the 'I' of a novel ... reflecting upon the varied episodes that occur ... and binding them ... into one subjective experience" (the main reason for the lengthy piano Cadenza in the middle).

A letter by Lambert himself throws further light: "I have always had negro voices (sic) in mind ... as the idea came from seeing Florence Mills in *Dover St. to Dixie* (Florence Mills was the vocal star of the celebrated 'Blackbirds' jazz ensemble which had appeared to great acclaim in London. After her early death in 1927 Lambert had dedicated the piano solo 'Elegiac Blues' to her memory.)

The Rio Grande was originally scored for piano solo, chorus and orchestra without woodwind, with a brief alto solo at the end of the work which ultimately hovers like a disembodied memory of all that has been seen and heard. Tonight the orchestral parts are played on a second piano.

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INTERVAL of about 15 minutes

George Gershwin: *Porgy and Bess*
Concert Version by Robert Russell Bennett

Gershwin's operatic masterpiece was composed in 1935 to a libretto by his brother Ira and DuBose Heyward, after a play by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward *Porgy*. The first performance in Boston has been followed by some memorable revivals, most notably on Broadway in 1953 and more recently at Glyndebourne in 1989 under Simon Rattle. Gershwin's intention to unite American vernacular styles with the norms of opera succeeded brilliantly and created a unique work, the originality and freshness of which has rarely been matched. This concert version draws together all the most famous numbers from the opera.

Synopsis

ACT I

Scene: Catfish Row, a negro tenement on the waterfront of Charleston, South Carolina

Half a dozen couples dance a low-down blues to piano **Introduction**. Clara sits rocking her baby and singing a lullaby, **Summertime**. As the baby remains awake, Jake takes over and administers some paternal advice, **A Woman Is A Sometime Thing**. When this also fails to send the baby to sleep, Clara takes it home.

[Crown, high on drink enters with Bess on his arm. An argument with Robbins develops into a fight in which Crown kills Robbins. Crown flees leaving Bess to find another man. Shunned by everyone else, the only door that is open to her is the cripple, Porgy who has always had a soft spot for Bess.]

In her room, Serena mourns her dead husband, Robbins (**Gone, Gone, Gone**), while her neighbours place donations for the funeral in a saucer on the dead man's chest, with the exhortation to **Fill Up De Saucer Till It Overflow**). The chorus is followed by Serena's lamentation **My Man's Gone Now**.

ACT II

Jake and other fishermen repair their netting. Porgy, now with Bess, sings of his contentment: **Oh, I Got Plenty O' Nuttin'**. This, in turn, leads to the duet between Porgy and Bess: **Bess, You Is My Woman Now**. The scene moves to Kittiwah Island where a picnic is in full swing. The mood of exuberance is caught in the chorus **Oh I Can't Sit Down**. Drink has been flowing in profusion and **Sporting Life**, high on "happy dust" as well, now leads the party in a song poking fun at Bible stories: **It Ain't Necessarily So**.

[Crown has been hiding on the island and now accosts Bess. She tells Crown that she is now with Porgy, but Crown dismisses this with a sneer and drags Bess into the undergrowth. When she returns to Catfish Row after two days, Porgy realises with whom she has been. During a storm Crown bursts in to claim Bess from Porgy. Later, Porgy stabs and kills Crown. Despite the silent loyalty of his friends in not exposing the killer, Porgy is jailed for a week for contempt of court in refusing to identify the body of Crown.]

While Porgy is away, **Sporting Life** takes his chance in trying to persuade Bess to come away with him **There's A Boat Leavin' Soon For New York**. A brief piano interlude, a reprise of the opening prelude, here covers the return of Porgy from jail in a state of fevered anticipation at seeing his Bess again. He is eventually told that Bess has gone off with **Sporting Life** to New York. If Bess is alive, he will find her, even if it means travelling a thousand miles. As he sets off in his goat-cart, all Catfish Row join him in the spiritual **Oh Lawd, I'm On My Way**.

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