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Guildford Philharmonic

Backstage at Britain's
concert halls

Villa-Lobos
repertoire guide

ISSN 0961-2696



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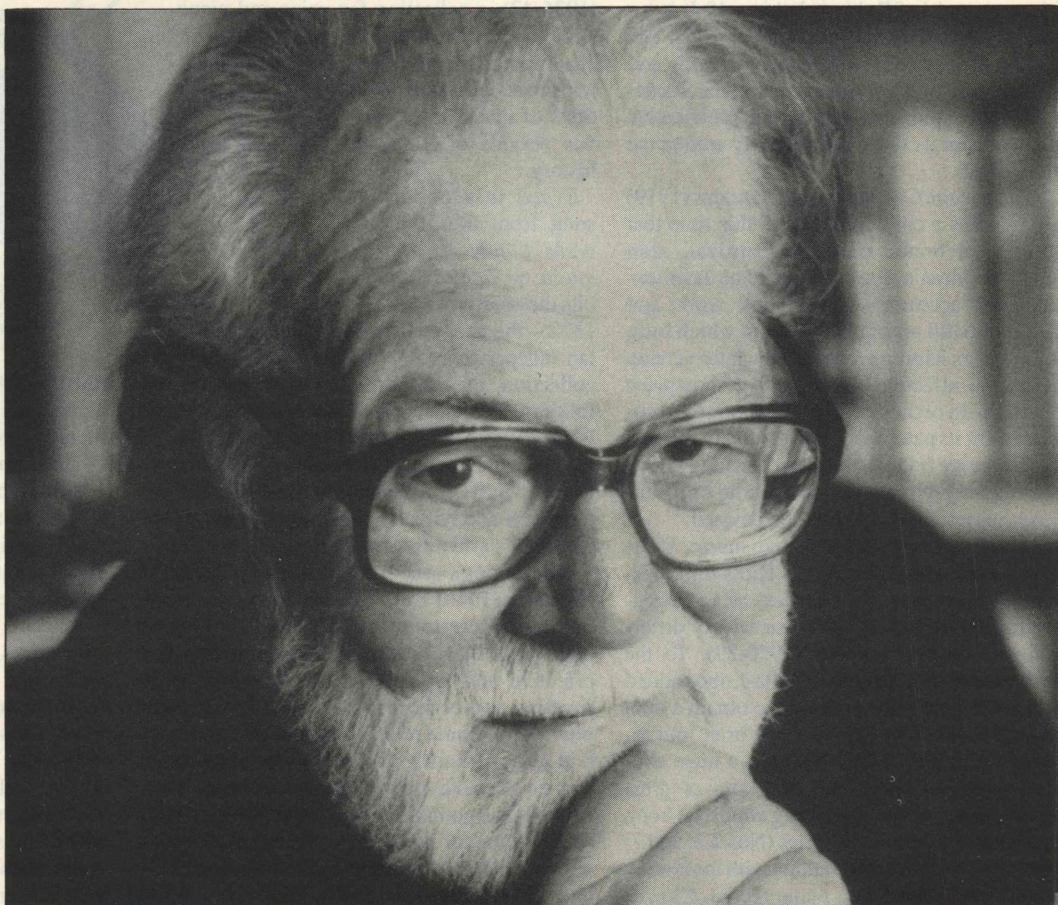
Gilding the lily

Not only does the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra enjoy a unique position as a high-standard professional orchestra supported by a country town – it also has a strong policy combining old favourites and new works, and this season presents a major South East Arts commission by Sebastian Forbes. Terry Barfoot reports

‘**W**hat makes the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra unique as a professional freelance orchestra is that it is centred on and supported by a relatively small country town, and that under Vernon Handley and now Sir Charles Groves, it achieves such consistently high standards of performance. Its success is due in no small measure to the efficient and friendly management team led by Kathy Atkins.’

The words of Victor Slaymark, the orchestra’s second clarinet and one of its longest-serving members, are typical of the affection and commitment which surround the GPO, as it has inevitably become known. It came into being in 1945, when Crossley Clitheroe became administrator and conductor; he lobbied the council that the orchestra should have its own concert hall rather than perform in the Technical College or the Odeon cinema. His wish was eventually granted when the Civic Hall opened in 1962, but tragically Clitheroe had died just three weeks beforehand. Since then his memory has been preserved each season by a concert bearing his name.

Vernon Handley was appointed in 1962, and during his stay of more than 20 years he revolutionised the structure, until the orchestra became fully professional using players from the London freelance pool. During those years Handley secured both his own and the orchestra’s reputations, especially in the British repertoire which, says general manager Kathy Atkins, still forms a central feature of artistic policy.



Sir Charles Groves: appreciating excellence and dedication

It was in 1986 that Sir Charles Groves took up the position of principal conductor, and their work together gives him enormous satisfaction: ‘I am extremely pleased to be so closely associated with the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra for a number of reasons, the first being the excellence and dedication

of the musicians. Then the orchestra is supported by a small but admirable administration whose head, Kathy Atkins, is a manager of great experience completely trusted by the players. And lastly we are fortunate indeed that Guildford Borough Council has supported both financially and philosophically the

enterprising musical policy.’

Hugh Bean and John Ludlow act as co-leaders. Bean, who joined the Philharmonia as leader 36 years ago, holds Guildford in special esteem. He believes the strong artistic policy is an important factor in generating such loyalty from the players. ‘There’s a balance be-

an area overplayed in Villa-Lobos's work this, and the **Três poemas indígenas** (1926), settings for contralto and orchestra of three tribal songs, stand as landmarks in the establishment of a distinctive Amerindian spirit in concert music.

Although Villa-Lobos was no piano virtuoso, his works for the instrument present, in microcosm, a vision of the whole glittering Brazilian scene, while taking on board influences and techniques of Debussy, Ravel, and Milhaud. The **Suite Floral** (1916-8) and **Simples Coletânea** (1917-9) are collections of delightful Brazilian vignettes: gardens, dances, a singing country girl, and an enchanted cradle. Villa-Lobos's friendship with Rubinstein prompted the composition of the suite **A Prole do Bebê No 1** (1918), which depicts – by superimposing simple Brazilian lullabys and children's themes on to impressionistic piano textures – the various dolls of a young child. From this, *O policinello* (Mr Punch) was a favourite Rubinstein encore, but the whole work makes a delightful and unusual addition to any recital.

By contrast, the vast **Rudepoema** (1921-26) is a 'piano portrait' of Rubinstein himself. It is tumultuous, violent, and devastatingly honest. The cascades of glissandi, hammered *ostinati*, and few brief passages of tenderness place **Rudepoema** among the most original and provocative piano works of its time, and certainly among the most difficult.

The piano suite **Carnaval das Crianças** (1919) again inhabits a childhood world, this time that of Rio's celebrated pre-Lent Carnival, seen through children's eyes. Villa-Lobos later expanded this accessible and melodic work, and added orchestral accompaniment, in which form it is known as **Momoprecoce**. This later version provides an effective and attractive showpiece for piano with orchestra, rich in instrumental sonority and in its patchwork use of nursery themes. **Momoprecoce** is ideal 'Saturday morning young persons' concert' material: an opening or simultaneous narration could easily be devised.

In his attempt to stylize Brazilian music, Villa-Lobos seized upon the spirit of Rio's improvising street musicians (the *chorões*) as a starting-point for a series of 14 works for widely differing forces entitled **Choros** (1920-29). To the simulated sound of the *choro* Villa-Lobos added negro and Amerindian elements to obtain a total vision of Brazil. **Choros No 1** is a brief 'improvisation' for guitar, while **No 11** is a huge concerted work for piano and orchestra of great concentration and beauty, lasting almost an hour. The chamber works in the series (**Nos 2, 3, and 7**) would all lie well in a programme with the **Nonet**, and the doleful **No 5** in a piano recital. **Choros No 4** should be taken up by brass ensembles: it is an amusing quartet redolent of a badly organised but well-meaning Latin American band. **Choros No 10**, for chorus and orchestra, best demonstrates the moods and techniques of the series. A magnificent orchestral jungle evocation leads into a choral rhapsody which fuses Amerindian incantation with a genuine popular song from turn-of-the-century Rio.

Organisations seeking unusual choral and orchestral repertoire should consider the four suites which Villa-Lobos assembled from his film score

The Discovery of Brazil. The film, made in Brazil in 1937, was an idealised epic depicting Cabral's voyage of discovery in 1500, and the landing in the new world of Brazil. Villa-Lobos's music was opulent and romantic, splendidly in style with the idealised grandeur of the film, although he drew heavily on authentic Hispanic and Amerindian musical sources for material. **Suites 1, 2, and 3** are orchestral, using music from different scenes in the film: the sailing of the caravels, the sailors' moods, celebrations, and despairs. **Suite No 4** is an apotheosis depicting in dramatic choral colours the introduction of Christianity in the form of the First Mass in Brazil. The Suites' combined duration is 45 minutes, but selections may be made.

Villa-Lobos composed songs throughout his career. Deserving special mention, because of their succinct stylisations of all manner of Brazilian musical types, are the **Modinhas e Canções** (1936-43), a collection for voice and piano (later with orchestra) of re-creations of the archaic Ibero-Brazilian song form *modinha* interspersed with masterly imitations of music from various periods of Brazilian history.

Evoçã is a popular song from the 1930s, while *Lundu da Mar-queza de Santos* inhabits the courtly world of 1822 – the year of Brazilian independence. A similar collection, though concentrating more on raw folkloric elements, is the **Canções típicas brasileiras** (1919), ten songs with piano, also existing in orchestral versions. Sopranos should investigate the **Suite for Voice and Violin** (1923), by turns raw and lyrical, a depiction of the folklore of Brazil's arid north-east.

Villa-Lobos's sets of **12 Studies** (1929) and **5 Preludes** (1940) are staple fair for all guitarists, but his **Concerto** for the instrument, written for Segovia in 1951, deserves greater currency. It is effective and typically Latin American in its rhythms and orchestral pastel shades. It could provide welcome relief if promoters considered it in place of Rodrigo's more celebrated counterpart as the 20th century guitar concerto. Villa-Lobos's late commissions brought forth a stream of concertos for neglected instruments, the most attractive of which are those for **Harp** (1953), and for **Harmonica** (1955). Both are entirely idiomatic for their instruments, and are immediately approachable.

String quartets should all draw at least one of Villa-Lobos's 17 works in this genre into their repertoire. Into his quartets Villa-Lobos consistently poured the private reflections of his experimental, public music. A sensible plan may be to contrast the lyrical, jovial, and satirical **Quartet No 1** (1915) with the intense final work in the series (1957), music first performed in Washington as its composer lay dying in Rio de Janeiro.

Villa-Lobos's operatic works have long been



neglected, but light opera companies searching for novelties should consider **Mag-**

dalena (1947), a musical in all but name, with catchy, singable, stereotypical Latin American melody throughout, centred around an amusingly absurd plot. It has recently been recorded.

Villa-Lobos's early love of Bach, and a feeling that there are affinities between this composer and Brazilian folk music, resulted in the composition (1930-45) of nine suites with the untranslatable title **Bachianas brasileiras**, an attempt to synthesise the spirit of *choros* with that of Bach. The works, like the *Choros*, are for different instrumental combinations, from wind duo (**No 6**) to full orchestra (**Nos 2, 7, and 8**). The celebrated **No 5**, for soprano and orchestra of cellos, is undoubtedly Villa-Lobos's best loved work but **No 1**, for cello orchestra alone, contains equally ravishing moments, particularly in the *Modinha*, and could sensibly be programmed alongside its more famous companion, as may also the luminous transcriptions of Bach Preludes and Fugues for orchestra of cellos which Villa-Lobos made in 1940. The orchestral **Bachianas No 2** contains a wonderful imitation of an antiquated locomotive, *The Little Train of the Caipira*, and **No 9**, a complex prelude and fugue, conveniently exists in versions for string orchestra and for a *cappella* voices.

The Repertoire Guide is a fortnightly service for programmers, performers and the public in the next issue:
Peter Dickinson on Sir Lennox Berkeley

GUILDFORD PHILHARMONIC

tween box office favourites and worthwhile new works, and much care goes into planning the season. Sir Charles has works he particularly wants to conduct – for example he wanted to do Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in Guildford Cathedral near his 75th birthday. In the orchestra there's a family atmosphere which is absolutely unparalleled.'

There are regular principals throughout the orchestra, and in the woodwind and brass sections they have the task of recommending players. The string players are fixed from the office, and since there is no firm contract involved, a relationship of trust becomes crucial. According to Kathy Atkins, 'those people who receive dates and schedules are not bound by them, but we hope they can do them and they generally do.' There is no strict auditioning system, and therefore a sense of teamwork prevails, Sir Charles regularly meeting with the leaders and manager to discuss progress and planning.

Atkins became general manager – her official title is 'music administrator for the Borough of Guildford' – when Vernon Handley left in 1983, having worked with him first as his personal assistant and then as concerts manager. She controls a team of three: music administrator Peter Holt, who looks after the music in the library sense, clerical assistant Shirley Ewen, and Linda Mowat, who is concerts assistant and education officer, a post made possible by a grant from the Musicians' Union.

The basis of the GPO's work is the annual subscription series of 12 concerts at the Civic Hall. During the current season the repertoire ranges from the St John Passion to *The Rite of Spring*, from the Verdi Requiem to Martinu's *Frescoes*. And British music again features strongly: *The Dream of Gerontius* and the Elgar Violin Concerto, Frank Bridge's *Enter Spring*, and a major South East Arts commission, *Sinfonia 3* by Sebastian Forbes.

Forbes is professor at the University of Surrey, and the premiere of his single-movement symphony under Sir Charles Groves on 9 March is part of the 'Guildford 91' festival, one aspect of which is to bring together town and gown. Forbes says of his new piece that 'the listener will be aware of purely musical values at work. It speaks in its own terms – I seem to be almost alone in not wanting to describe my music in terms of fanciful stupid titles.'

The orchestra is committed to

providing musical experiences of a diverse nature, such as day schools and workshops, schools concerts and pre-concert talks. Young artists give monthly lunchtime recitals in the wonderful setting of the medieval Guildhall, while Hilary Davan Wetton directs the Classical Road Show series for family audiences, discussing the music before the interval, performing it after. In November 1989 the 'Adopt a Player' scheme was set up to introduce young people to the musicians and their instruments, by presenting workshops in the schools and linking them to concerts at which special family tickets are available. The South East Music Trust, founded in 1972, is responsible for this and other aspects of development, such as taking the orchestra out into the wider region of the south and east.

In 1975 South East Arts adopted the orchestra in this role, and Atkins is happy to see engagements develop. 'We appear regularly in Crawley and in Folkestone and Eastbourne. I'd like to do annual visits to the major promoters; but of course we need to keep the right balance, tying in rehearsals and our programming structure.' Judith Clark, South East Arts music officer, has a high regard for what is being done: 'The GPO is a high status revenue client whose programming is exciting and whose work is distinguished. Guildford is the only local authority in the region which chooses to support an orchestra, a commendable effort.'

How all these developments turn out could hinge upon an Arts Council appraisal which is presently being carried out. Additionally, recordings are planned, following the celebrated recordings of Bax and Finzi which were made several years ago. The links with Guildford's twin town of Freiburg have already stimulated a visit to Germany by the excellent Philharmonic Choir; a further trip is planned for later this year with Hugh Bean and the strings of the GPO. Inevitably sponsorship is an important factor, needed especially to build upon the foundation provided by the borough, to ensure that adventurous programming can continue through the funding of extra rehearsals. It is a matter of policy that 'all concerts are performed to the highest possible standard through adequate rehearsal time'. And since Guildford is just half an hour away from London that commitment to artistic integrity is as significant as it is refreshing. □

GUILDFORD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Principal Conductor: SIR CHARLES GROVES

Saturday 9 March at 7.30pm	Fantasia - Bliss Enter Spring - Bridge Sir Charles Groves conductor ALL TICKETS SOLD	Sinfonia 3 (world premier) - Forbes Violin Concerto - Elgar Nigel Kennedy violin
Sunday 24 March at 3.00pm	Piano Concerto No 1 in D minor Symphony No 6 in F (Pastoral) John Lill piano	Brahms Beethoven Volker Wangerheim conductor
Sunday 14 April at 3.00pm	HOMAGE TO MOZART Symphonies 39, 40 and 41 Sir Charles Groves conductor	
Saturday 27 April at 7.30pm	The Dream of Gerontius Linda Finnie, Arthur Davies, Philharmonic Choir	Elgar Michael Pearce Vernon Handley conductor
Saturday 11 May at 7.30pm	Symphony No. 1 in Bb Spring Symphony No. 1 in D Mahler Sir Charles Groves conductor	Schumann Mahler Sponsored by Amdahl (UK) Ltd.

Concerts are at the Civic Hall Guildford except where stated.
Box Office 0483 444555. Information about concerts and the
Orchestra contact: Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra Office,
The Lodge, Allen House Grounds, Chertsey St.,
Guildford GU1 4HL. Telephone 0483 444666

GPO

KLAUS ZOLL

Soloist in Mozart piano concertos with the
Bournemouth Sinfonietta
conducted by Tamas Vasary

Piano Concerto no 25, K 503:

Wednesday 6th March 1991

Poole Arts Centre

7.30 pm

Thursday 7th March

Colston Hall

Bristol

7.30 p

(to be recorded by the BBC for future transmission)

Concerto for two pianos, K365

with Tamas Vasary

Friday 8th March

Sheldonian Theatre

Oxford

7.30 pm

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