

The thirty-fourth concert in the Enterprising series

Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra

Guildford Borough Council Concerts 1974-75

Civic Hall—Guildford
SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER 1974
at 7.45 p.m.

Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra

Guest Leader RICHARD LAYTON

Philharmonic Choir

Roy Gillard

Vernon Handley

This concert is promoted by Guildford
Borough Council with financial assistance
from the Arts Council of Great Britain

Philharmonic Choir

The Philharmonic Choir is the larger of the two choirs under the conductorship of the Musical Director, who acknowledges with thanks the help he has received in training the choir from Mr Kenneth Lank, and accompanists Miss Mary Rivers, Miss Patricia Finch and Miss Prudence Edden.

Roy Gillard

Roy Gillard was born in Hirwaun, South Wales. He began his studies with Walter Gerhardt, and later with Granville Jones. During his time as a student at the Guildhall School of Music he was awarded the Worshipful Company of Musicians Silver Medal for the most outstanding student, and was also invited to join the London String Quartet. Since that time he has been a leading member of the English Chamber Orchestra, and, more recently, with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, with whom he has recorded as soloist. He is at present the sub-leader of the London Symphony Orchestra.

El Corpus En Sevilla Albeniz, 1860-1909

El Corpus en Sevilla is a tone painting of the Corpus Christi Procession and Festival. The Procession, strewn with flowers, winds its way along the streets and halts from time to time while spontaneous songs are improvised by the Votaries. This tone picture is notable for the fascinating interplay of two themes: a March and one of the spontaneous songs. It ends with a moving impression of the town after the Procession has gone into the distance.

Violin Concerto in D Stravinsky, 1882-1971

Toccatà; Aria 1; Aria 2; Capriccio

When Stravinsky reacted against the emotional colour and intensity of his early works, he embraced neo-classicism, and one of the outstanding examples of his 'back to Bach' period is the Violin Concerto in D. Yet that tag, so often applied to works of this period is misleading, especially in

the first and last movements of this work, for it goes beyond Bach and espouses a cool objectivity which Bach's very human music could never have.

The first and last movements have the hypnotic rhythms which we associate with his big romantic ballets, but these are now coldly orchestrated and studied for themselves alone, rather than the colour they can be dressed in. The soloist, although given a virtuoso role, often calls for virtuoso accompaniment, and his melodic spans are rarely greater than those attempted by the orchestra. Either these two driving movements are a powerful argument between soloist and orchestra, or they are a tough and athletic friendship. The two central arias are much freer: both are lyrical, though never sentimental and require great control of phrasing from the soloist. They form an admirable contrast to the attacking nature of the outer movements, as well as a chance to hear a tone from the soloist which would be entirely out of place in the *Toccata* or the *Capriccio*. The *Concerto* is obviously diverting, but its great importance in Stravinsky's output lies in the fact that although the colour and richness of the earlier ballets has been rejected, this lean and angular *Concerto* could have been written by no other composer.

Ode to Death, Opus 38 for Chorus and Orchestra Holst, 1874-1934

In the centenary year of Holst's birth, this remarkably original British composer seems to have had very few performances of his more important and neglected works. Organisations pay lip service to the centenary by producing more performances of *The Planets*, *The Perfect Fool Ballet Music*, and the *Hymn of Jesus*, *The great Choral Symphony*, performed on Guildford in 1969, Egdon Heath and Hammersmith have received no more performances than usual; *The Morning of the Year*, the *Double Violin Concerto*, the *Ode to Death* have had one or two airings, or none at all.

Holst wrote the *Ode to Death* in 1919, three years after *The Planets* was finished

and four years before the *Choral Symphony*. In it he employed, as well as his own stark originality, a chromatic harmony for certain passages, which was never again to appear in his work.

Considered by many one of his finest works, it is probably performed very little simply because of its title, a superficial response to which is wholly misleading. Whitman's experiences on the battlefields of the American Civil War had led him to see death as a blessed release, and it was a development of this feeling that he voiced in his *Ode*. Such a different approach would be bound to attract the original-minded Holst, a composer always searching for the profound, the remote, yet never treating any unusual topic superficially. Holst's setting mirrors precisely Whitman's words: 'Lovely and soothing death' is given a cool, but beautiful, melody, the 'chant of fullest welcome' is sung to a majestic procession, the 'loving, floating ocean' receives the lovely chromatic harmony which elsewhere the composer eschews. Perhaps the most extraordinary stroke of composition comes at the end when the sopranos float a beautiful song, 'Over the tree tops', while the rest of the choir intone their original welcome to death in the background. This gives a formal completeness to the work which would otherwise have been difficult to achieve with the words as they stood. There is nothing morbid or sickly about the *Ode* or its setting. It is an original view of an honest idea, and as such it is unique in music.

ODE TO DEATH

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,
arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and
knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise!
praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding
death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft
feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of
fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above
all,

I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unflatteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I
joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee,
adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the
high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and
thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering
wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and
well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the
myriad fields and prairies wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the
teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee
O death.

Walt Whitman

INTERVAL

During the interval refreshments will be served by members of the Philharmonic Society in the Surrey Room.

Meditations on a Theme of John Blow Bliss, b 1891

The Meditations received its first performance in 1955. Sir Arthur had found amongst the anthems of John Blow in *Musica Britannica*, a tune in the *Sinfonia* for Strings which comes before the anthem *The Lord is my Shepherd*. He got the idea of a set of variations, but the form the work took was so influenced by

the ideas in the psalm that it could not be written as a theme with its set. Just as in the psalm the psalmist is confident of the Lord's constant support, he does not reach the House of the Lord until the end of the poem. The composer therefore reserves the full statement of John Blow's lovely tune for the very end of the work. The meditations on the tune are variations on parts of it worked into illustrations of contrasted ideas of the psalm, leading to a triumphant statement of the tune itself when we have entered the House of the Lord.

Introduction—The Lord is my Shepherd, I will fear no evil: a pastoral scene with flutes and sheep bells interrupted by an agitated and evil figure on the brass.

Meditation 1—He leadeth me beside still waters: a tranquil allegro moderato, reminiscent of Bach.

Meditation 2—Thy rod and staff they comfort me: allegro deciso; nobody but Bliss could have written this forthright determined variation, the natural accents of the tune having been brought forward one beat.

Meditation 3—Lambs: dotted note tunes derived from Blow's last phrase form an intermezzo.

Meditation 4—He restoreth my soul: another determined allegro, this time with clear phrases of John Blow's tune emerging every now and then.

Meditation 5—In green pastures: a movement in three parts, two illustrations of the pastures flanking the most beautiful tune, which is in itself meditative as well as a meditation on Blow's tune.

Interlude—Through the valley of the shadow of death: the full orchestra and a battery of percussion are subjected to variations of time, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/4 and 7/4, in one of the most terrifying orchestral passages ever written.

Finale—In the House of the Lord: the brass intone as a chorale the first phrase of John Blow's tune, but Bliss is not mawkish. If we are in the House of the Lord, would it not be a good thing to dance? The great dance ensues, bells herald the arrival of John Blow, his tune is triumphantly stated. He retires to a more tranquil version, and we are left with the scene as it was at the beginning. Memories of the different meditations are quoted; there is one last look at the terrifying evil prospect, and then a chord of confident affirmation finishes the work.

The Meditations is all things as an orchestral work: variety and contrast are expressed with musical economy, though with great recourse to orchestral virtuosity, and couched in an original approach to variation form, which makes it one of the composer's masterpieces. On closer acquaintance it becomes one of the most emotionally satisfying works of the twentieth century.

SATURDAY 16 NOVEMBER
at 7.30 p.m.

A concert promoted by the South East Music Trust in CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL (By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter)

Overture-Fantasia 'Hamlet'—
Tchaikovsky

Variations on a Rococo theme for Cello
and Orchestra—Tchaikovsky

Ode to Death for chorus and orchestra
—Holst

Meditations on a theme of John Blow—
Bliss

Rohan de Saram—Cello

Vernon Handley—Conductor

Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra

Co-Leader John Ludlow

Philharmonic Choir

Tickets £1.50; £1.25; £1.00; 75p; 50p and 30p
available from The Friends Office, Flat 1,
8 The Precincts, Canterbury.

SUNDAY 24 NOVEMBER 1974
at 3.00 p.m.
CIVIC HALL, GUILDFORD

Overture 'Prince Igor'—Borodin

Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini—
Rachmaninov

***Symphony No. 5 in F, opus 76—Dvorak**

Jacques Klein—Pianoforte

***Christopher Adey**
Conductors

Vernon Handley