

Guildford
Philharmonic
Orchestra

Play Rec *Ode to B*
H

SATURDAY 16 NOVEMBER 1974
at 7.30 p.m.

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

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Chapter)

**Guildford
Philharmonic
Orchestra**

Leader: JOHN LUDLOW

Philharmonic Choir

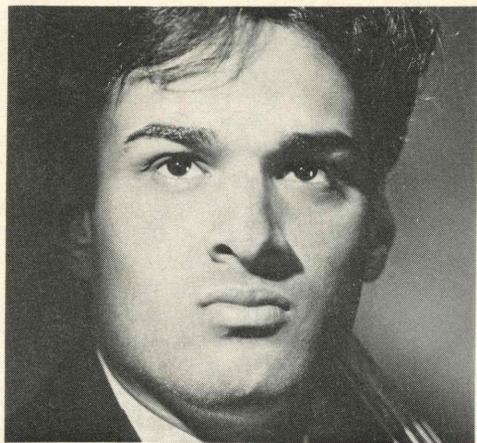
Rohan de Saram

Cello

Vernon Handley

Conductor

This Concert is promoted by the South East
Music Trust with financial assistance from
the South East Arts Association



ROHAN de SARAM

Rohan de Saram studied the cello with Gasper Cassado and Casals. He has played in Europe, Asia, U.S.A., Australia and the Soviet Union, appearing as soloist with the major orchestras of the world. Among the conductors with whom he has worked are Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Sir John Barbirolli, Sir Charles Groves, Colin Davis, Zubin Mehta, John Pritchard, Van Otterloo, Steinberg, Ozawa, Martinon, Scrowcewski. His debut in the U.S.A. was at the Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, at the invitation of Dmitri Mitropoulos.

He has worked personally with several composers, including Kodaly, Schostakovich, Poulenc, Walton and Rubbra. His performances of Xenakis' Nomos Alpha won great praise from the composer, who invited him to play it at the 1974 Xenakis Festival in Bonn. He performed the work at the English Bach Festival in 1973 subsequently broadcasting it on Hilversum Radio, Holland.

The famous cellist, Piatigorsky, has presented him, after a recital in America, with a special bow which he uses at concerts.



Vernon Handley

Vernon Handley was born in Enfield in 1930, and educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Before he came to Guildford he had amassed great experience as a free-lance conductor with choirs and orchestras, and had won several awards for conducting.

Vernon Handley has been Guildford's Musical Director for twelve years, raising the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra to professional status. He has conducted over 140 concerts in the large and modern Civic Hall with the Guildford musical forces: the Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonic and Proteus Choirs, both Choirs playing an active part in the annual concert series and performing many challenging and little-known works, in addition to the standard classics of the choral repertoire.

Vernon Handley broadcasts with all the B.B.C. Regional Orchestras, about 30 concerts a year, and appears regularly as guest Conductor with the London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras. He is one of the few British Conductors who will have as many as six records made or released within 1974. His recent record of music by Vaughan Williams and Tippett, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, has received wide acclaim. He is particularly noted for his championship of British music and was this year voted Conductor of the Year 1973 by the Composers' Guild of Great Britain.

PROGRAMME

Applause is permitted in the cathedral.

Fantasy-Overture 'Hamlet' Tchaikovsky 1840-1893

Tchaikovsky's fantasy-overture 'Hamlet' is one of the three works which he wrote on Shakespearian subjects. Of the other two, the fantasy-overture 'Romeo and Juliet' is amongst his most popular works, while the orchestral fantasy 'The Tempest', amongst his least known. It is interesting to note that one of the rare performances of 'The Tempest' was given by the Guildford Philharmonic in its series of unfamiliar works several seasons ago.

'Hamlet' is a much later work than 'Romeo and Juliet', the latter dates from 1869, whereas 'Hamlet' was composed in 1888, simultaneously it seems with the Fifth Symphony. Yet it is very different from that work. A more compressed form than 'Romeo and Juliet' and one somewhat nearer to 'Francesca da Rimini' lays before us clear sections of alternating material. The introduction, marked *lento lugubre*, has two important ideas: a tragic theme, heard on the lower strings and an agitated figure, heard on the strings and woodwind. There follows an *allegro vivace*, and after this is worked up to a climax, the supposed 'love' theme appears on the oboe. All the ideas heard up to now are heard in reverse order, and combine to produce a very dramatic full orchestra climax. This stark fantasy is brought to an end by a short funeral march which uses the first solemn theme.

Although not so immediately attractive as 'Romeo and Juliet', this work deserves a larger public by reason of its refusal to use anything more than the one beautiful element of Hamlet's and Ophelia's love, which the play provides. Tchaikovsky endeavours to and succeeds in sustaining interest with the darker and more sombre elements of the tragedy. One of the most imaginative sections is the 'love' theme played against strong opposition from the rest of the woodwind, and tiring string triplets, as if to suggest Ophelia's madness.

Variations on a Rococo Theme for 'Cello and Orchestra Tchaikovsky 1840-1893

This work, dedicated to the German 'cellist, Fitzenhagen, was composed in 1876 which was a time of feverish activity in Tchaikovsky's composing career for from this year also date the Third String Quartet, the Slavonic March, Swan Lake and Francesca da Rimini, and people who complain of the sparseness of development in Tchaikovsky's music could surely not argue against the power of an imagination which embraces these diverse subjects. Add to this list the fact that the Third Symphony was composed in the previous year and the Fourth Symphony in the following year, and one has the picture of a composer working almost at fever pitch. This, in fact, was the case, for a few years later he succumbed to a mood of intense depression. This, however, is not foreshadowed in the wonderful 'cello work that he wrote for his friend. Lightly scored and with many touches of chamber music style: this is how Tchaikovsky solves the 'cello and orchestral balance problem.

The work starts *moderato quasi andante*, which is merely a twenty bar introduction, and then the soloist announces the theme, *moderato semplice*. From there the variations run as follows:

Var. 1 Tempo del tema.

Triplets for the soloist, accompanied by pizzicato chords for the strings.

Var. 2 Tempo del tema.

Runs for the soloist, and the first few notes of the theme scattered over the whole orchestra.

Var. 3 Andante sostenuto. Three-four.

A straightforward version of the theme for the soloist, with comments from oboe and clarinet; the second half a decoration by the woodwind instruments of the soloist's tune.

Var. 4 Andante grazioso. Two-four.

The soloist's line becomes more florid, the accompaniment simpler, and passages for the soloist alone begin to appear.

Var. 5 Allegro moderato.

The soloist now decorates a version of the theme on the flute, and after a loud tutti the soloist is given a decorative passage before the flute returns with the tune. A large cadenza for the soloist completes this variation.

Var. 6 Andante.

Although melodically simple, the version now given to the soloist is charged with expression, and a great deal of the accompaniment is for off the beat pizzicato strings.

Var. 7 Allegro vivo.

This is, in fact, the finale. Running passages of extraordinary difficulty for the soloist, and the accompanists' ability to interject their tiny phrases strained to the utmost. The whole variation is a miracle of lightness, the fortes being quickly interchanged with piano and pianissimos.

INTERVAL

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 in 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 unfalteringly.

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

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.

GUILDFORD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Musical Director/Conductor: Vernon Handley

First Violins

Leader :
John Ludlow
Martin Hughes
Vaughan Armon
Diane Booth
Averil Carmalt
Bradley Creswick
Jean Fletcher
Vito Gambazza
Justin Jones
Robert Lewcock
Margaret Moss
Prunella Sedgwick
Nina Whitehurst

Second Violins

Nicholas Maxted
Jones
Rosemary Roberts
Marie Louise
Amberg
Nigel Broadbent
Margaret Harris
Donald Hart
Paul Manley
Nicholas Mathias
Adrienne Sturdy
Deryck Wareing
Anne West-Watson

Violas

Stephen Shingles
Roger Chase
Levine Andrade
Margaret Brookes
Dennis Curtis
Julian Shaw
Ruth Treloar

Cellos
Jack Holmes
John Stilwell
Christopher Lebon
Edward Doe
Miriam Crahin
Pauline Sadgrove
Paul Moxon

Basses

Paul Cullington
Keith Marjoram
Charles Cudmore
Jeremy Gordon
Sally Rowe

Flutes

George Crozier
Jane Parry

Piccolo

Clifford Seville

Oboes

James Brown
Janice Knight

Cor Anglais

Maurice Checker

Clarinets

John Denman
Victor Slaymark

Bass Clarinet

Gordon Lewin

Bassoons

Robert Jordan
Frank Warnock

Contra Bassoon

Nicholas Reader

Horns

Peter Clack
George Woodcock
Charles Bloomfield
Ian Urquhart
David Clack

Trumpets

Clifford Haines
Michael Hinton
Stephen
Hetherington

Trombones

Alfred Flaszynski
Trevor Herbert

Bass Trombone

Stephen Saunders

Tuba

Stephen Wick

Timpani

Roger Blair

Percussion

John Jeffery
Jonathan Tolansky
Jonathan Bose
Heather Steedman

Celesta

John Forster

Harp

Fiona Hibbert

Concert Manager

Kathleen Atkins

The audience may be interested to know that the violin sections are listed in alphabetical order after the first desk, because a rotation of desks is adopted in this orchestra, so that all players have the opportunity of playing in all positions in the section.