

CHAN 4506

**CHANDOS** BRASS

# Life Divine

**Bliss** Kenilworth

**Fletcher** Labour and Love

**Hespe** The Three Musketeers

**Jenkins** Life Divine

**John Foster Black Dyke Mills Band**

Major Peter Parkes

Derek Broadbent

## Life Divine

**Percy E. Fletcher** (1879–1932)

- |     |                        |       |
|-----|------------------------|-------|
| [1] | <b>Labour and Love</b> | 10:23 |
|     | Tone Poem              |       |

**George Hespe** (1900–1979)

- |     |   |       |
|-----|---|-------|
|     | <b>The Three Musketeers*</b>                  | 12:04 |
|     | Suite   |       |
| [2] | I Aramis, The Student. Introduction and Fugue | 4:07  |
| [3] | II Athos, Poet and Lover. Allegro grazioso    | 2:36  |
| [4] | III Porthos, The Good Companion. Serenade     | 2:51  |
| [5] | IV D'Artagnan, Soldier of Fortune. Polacca    | 2:23  |

**Sir Arthur Bliss** (1891–1975)

- |     |   |      |
|-----|---|------|
|     | <b>Kenilworth</b>                                 | 9:08 |
| [6] | I At the Castle Gate                              | 1:58 |
| [7] | II Serenade on the Lake                           | 2:12 |
| [8] | III March. Kenilworth (Homage to Queen Elizabeth) | 4:53 |

**Cyril Jenkins** (1889–1978)

- |     |                     |          |
|-----|---------------------|----------|
| [9] | <b>Life Divine*</b> | 13:28    |
|     | Tone Poem           |          |
|     |                     | TT 45:27 |

**Black Dyke Mills Band**

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With twenty-three British Open Championship and seventeen National Championship titles to its credit, not to mention six wins in the European Championships and one World Championship success, the Black Dyke Mills Band is superbly qualified to record this collection of famous test pieces.

Although there is no direct connection between the band and the four pieces chosen for this album, the works are representative of the type of music associated with this great band's finest moments.

The Tone Poem *Life Divine* composed by Cyril Jenkins, a Welshman, for the 1921 National Brass Band Championship at Crystal Palace, was a landmark in the history of brass band music. Whereas previous original test pieces retain strong features of the operatic selection form so much loved by bands of the period, *Life Divine* has more than a hint of symphonic development, and its technical demands, considered horrendous at the time, still challenge all but the finest bands.

It is said that the composer's working title, 'A Comedy of Errors', was rejected by the publisher on the grounds that it might irritate bandmen as they struggle through the early stages of rehearsal.

William Halliwell, one of the all-time 'Greats' (and former professional conductor of the Black Dyke Mills Band), said after an initial run through the piece by one of his bands:

The band that plays *Life Divine* really well will have the right to be included with the people mentioned in Scripture as being 'arrayed in white and having gone through great tribulation'.

After the 1921 contest, experts claimed that the preparation involved had improved the technique of the best bands by twenty-five per cent and of the worst by 100 per cent.

Denounced by some as a piece of 'Lisztian bombast', *Life Divine* occupies a special place in the affections of most bandmen, its furious trills, sweeping chromatic runs, declamatory trombone statements (redolent of Wagner or Elgar) and wry humour speaking directly to the emotions.

*Labour and Love* preceded *Life Divine* by eight years and was actually the first original work for brass band to be set as test piece for the National Championships. History has credited John Henry Iles, founder of the National Brass Band Festival, with the perspicacity of commissioning Percy Fletcher – a conductor at His Majesty's Theatre,



London – to compose a piece for the 1913 Championship.

Reports in the *British Bandsman* of the period suggest, however, that Fletcher actually submitted the Tone Poem speculatively, in response to a general call from Herbert Whiteley, the newspaper's editor, for 'better music'. Whiteley, a much underrated personality, was Iles's adviser on musical matters and, recognising the potential of Fletcher's score, he probably persuaded Iles to set it for the contest that year.

Up to then band contest music consisted almost entirely of transcriptions. Musically, the band scene was in a rut, and the crucial decision by Iles and Whiteley to break new ground set in motion a chain of events which later involved Holst, Elgar, Ireland, Howells, Bliss, Vaughan Williams and other prominent composers, laying the foundations for today's repertoire.

In *Labour and Love* Percy Fletcher cleverly avoided revolutionising the accepted approach to band music. His tone poem had tunes and cadenzas (a must in early day test pieces) and the subject appealed to the working man, as performer and listener. In essence it pictures a purposeless, discontented man transformed by the love of his wife and children into a happy and diligent worker. The piece is straightforward in form and direct in its communication. Its themes, though not

startlingly original, are individual and well treated, and there is plenty of contrast.

Sir Arthur Bliss, Master of the Queen's Musick from 1953 until his death in 1975, was a tireless champion of the brass band, contributing two major works to the serious repertoire: *Kenilworth* (1936) and *Belmont Variations* (1963).

When asked to compose the test piece for the 1936 Championship – the last to take place before Crystal Palace was reduced to a pile of ashes – Bliss determined to find a subject that suited the brilliance of the tone and was worthy of the magnificent technique of brass band players. He thought that

the true home of brass bands was in the open air, where their power of conveying ceremony and pageantry, brilliant or solemn, was most finely felt.

Motoring home from Birmingham after he had conducted a concert, the composer and his wife stopped for lunch at Kenilworth, and strolled over the Castle grounds. As they wandered from dungeon to tower, Bliss began to visualise the drama, romance, revelry and battle that the ancient walls had seen over the centuries. The idea for *Kenilworth* was born.

Based on an account by Sir Walter Scott of the famous visit by Queen Elizabeth in 1575, the opening section, 'At the Castle Gate', with its fanfare-like figures, describes the arrival of the Queen, mounted on a milk-white horse.

Then follows a quiet, lyrical movement depicting the welcome from the Spirit of the Lake. Titled 'Serenade on the Lake', it offers romantic solo passages which give the cornet, euphonium, trombone and baritone opportunity for expression. Finally, an Elgarian introduction leads to the 'March. Kenilworth (Homage to Queen Elizabeth)', portraying the enthusiasm of loyal subjects for the presence of their Queen.

Martial in style, and with harmonic language and rhythmic construction which appeared to be daringly, even offensively, modern at the time, *Kenilworth* continues to thrill band audiences.

George Hespe's Suite *The Three Musketeers* is, as the title suggests, romantic and picturesque. Used as the test piece for the 1953 British Open Championship at Belle Vue, Manchester (won by the visiting National Band of New Zealand), the work has four movements – each dedicated to one of Hespe's four sons – which portray the characters of Aramis, Athos, Porthos and D'Artagnan, from the writings of Alexandre Dumas.

Aramis, The Student, is represented by the 'Introduction and Fugue' which opens the piece. Something of an enigma, as he flits from cassock to sword, he is acclaimed with scholarly fugal dignity.

Athos, Poet and Lover, a nobleman of great physical and mental attributes, battles to retain his lofty ideals despite tragic circumstances. The music, marked *Allegro grazioso*, is in turn lyrical and emotional.

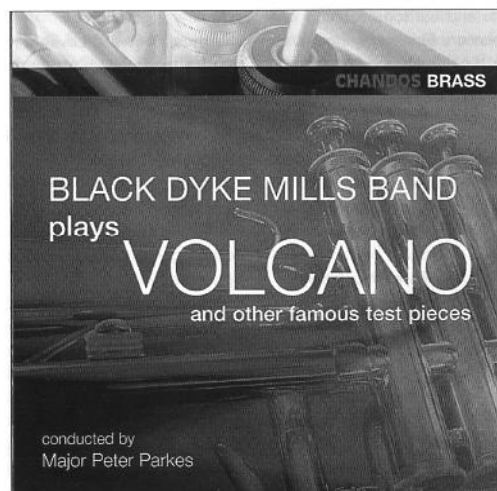
Porthos, The Good Companion, features in a 'Serenade' consisting of two songs without words: the first a drinking song in which the basses have a portly, Rabelaisian tune, and the second giving cornet and trombone opportunity to sing of love.

The final movement, 'Polacca', reveals D'Artagnan, Soldier of Fortune, in brilliant-sounding music, full of rhythmic verve.

The piece makes no huge intellectual demands on the listener, who might, nevertheless, note the use of the opening diatonic motif which, one way and another, crops up throughout the work, giving a unity not always found in music of this form.

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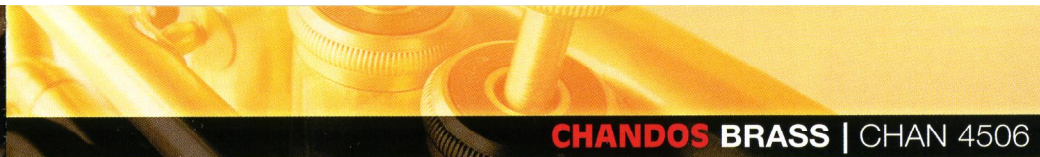
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