**CHANDOS** SUPER AUDIO CD

Vaughan COMPLETE Williams Symphonies

Richard Hickox Sir Andrew Davis



Ralph Vaughan Williams, right, with Gustav Holst, during a walk in the Malvern Hills, September 1921

# Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

# **Complete Symphonies**

COMPACT DISC ONE

		A Sea Symphony (Symphony No. 1) (1903 – 09, last revised 1923)*† for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra	66:24
1	1	A Song for All Seas, All Ships Moderato maestoso	19:09
2	2	On the Beach at Night, Alone Largo sostenuto	10:56
3	3	Scherzo. The Waves Allegro brillante	7:54
4	4	The Explorers	28:23
		Grave e molto adagio	TT 66:24

# COMPACT DISC TWO

# world première recording

		A London Symphony (Symphony No. 2) (1911 - 13)* Original 1913 version	61:27
1	- 1	Lento – Allegro risoluto	15:07
2	Ш	Lento	16:17
3	Ш	Scherzo (Nocturne). Allegro vivace – Andantino	11:07
4	IV	Andante con moto - Maestoso alla marcia (quasi lento) - Allegro - Andantino ma sostenuto - Tempo I - Allegro - Lento -	
		Epilogue. Andante sostenuto – Lento	18:54
			TT 61:27

### COMPACT DISC THREE

		Pastoral Symphony (Symphony No. 3) (compl. 1921)**	39:05
1	- 1	Molto moderato - Poco tranquillo -	
		Tempo I – Largamente – Tempo I	10:44
2	Ш	Lento moderato - Poco tranquillo, tempo rubato -	
		Tempo I	10:23
3	Ш	Moderato pesante - Poco animato - A tempo - Presto	6:32
4	IV	Lento - Moderato maestoso - Animato - Poco più lento -	
		Tempo I	11:14
		Symphony No. 4 (1931 - 34)*	31:51
		in F minor • in f-Moll • en fa mineur	
5	- 1	Allegro - Meno mosso - Largamente - Lento	8:07
6	Ш	Andante moderato – Tranquillo	10:13
7	Ш	Scherzo. Allegro molto –	5:02
8	IV	Finale con Epilogo Fugato. Allegro molto – Lento (non troppo) -	-
		Tempo I – Con anima – Meno mosso	8:28
			TT 71:03

# COMPACT DISC FOUR

		<b>Symphony No. 5</b> (1938 – 43, revised 1951)* in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur	39:33
1	-1	Preludio. Moderato	12:17
2	Ш	Scherzo. Presto misterioso	4:57
3	Ш	Romanza. Lento	12:01
4	IV	Passacaglia. Moderato	10:00
		Symphony No. 6 (1944 – 47, revised 1950)* in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur To Michael Mullinar	35:30
5	-1	Allegro - Poco animato - Tranquillo	7:23
6	Ш	Moderato	10:53
7	Ш	Scherzo. Allegro vivace	6:20
8	IV	Epilogue. Moderato	10:53 <b>TT 75:10</b>

# COMPACT DISC FIVE

		Sinfonia Antartica (Symphony No. 7) (1949 – 51) <sup>§¶</sup> for Soprano Solo, Female Chorus, and Orchestra To Ernest Irving	41:40
1	1	Prelude. Andante maestoso – Largamente – Lento – Poco più mo Tempo I – Poco animato – Più mosso – Meno mosso – Tranquillo – Andante moderato con moto – Largamente	sso - 9:31
2	2	Scherzo. Moderato - Poco animando - Moderato - Poco animato Moderato scherzando - L'istesso tempo - Meno mosso	- 5:47
3	3	Landscape. Lento - Andante sostenuto - Lento - Poco meno lent Tempo I - Poco meno lento - Moderato - Lento - Poco meno mosso -	:o - 10:31
4	4	Intermezzo. Andante sostenuto - Allegretto - Pesante - Poco più lento - Tempo I tranquillo	6:14
5	5	Epilogue. Alla marcia, moderato (non troppo allegro) – Lento – Allegro moderato – Andante maestoso	9:22

		Symphony No. 9 (1956 – 57)§ in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur	33:32
		Dedicated to the Royal Philharmonic Society	
		Martin Winter flugelhorn	
6	- 1	Moderato maestoso - Tranquillo	9:03
7	Ш	Andante sostenuto - Poco animando -	
		Tempo I - Moderato tranquillo -	
		Tempo I - Poco animato ma pesante - Moderato sostenuto -	
		Tempo I	7:35
8	Ш	Scherzo. Allegro pesante - [] - Tempo del principio -	5:39
9	IV	Andante tranquillo - Poco animato - Tempo I - Andante sosteni	uto –
		Tempo I - Poco animato - Poco animato - Andante sostenuto -	
		Poco meno mosso - Poco animando - Ancora poco animando -	
		Poco animato ma pesante – Largamente	11:07
		Т	T 75:22

# COMPACT DISC SIX

		Symphony No. 8 (1953 – 55)* in D minor • in d-Moll • en ré mineur Dedicated to John Barbirolli	28:29
1	I	Fantasia (Variazioni senza tema) Moderato – Presto – Andante sostenuto – Allegretto – Andante non troppo – Allegro vivace – Andante sostenuto – Largamente – Tempo I ma tranquillo	10:42
2	II	Scherzo alla marcia Per gli stromenti a vento Allegro alla marcia – Andante – Tempo I	3:41
3	III	Cavatina Per gli stromenti a corde Lento espressivo	9:04
4	IV	Toccata colle campanelle Moderato maestoso	5:01

	Ralph Vaughan Williams reminisces Lecture broadcast on 17 November 1955	28:42
5	Broadcast Introduction -	0:28
6	Lecture Introduction -	0:55
7	Ralph Vaughan Williams discusses Parry -	13:35
8	Ralph Vaughan Williams discusses Stanford	13:43
9	Barbara Hooper interviews Sir John Barbirolli The conductor recalls Ralph Vaughan Williams on the day of the composer's death, 26 August 1958, in an interview broadcast on that day	5:31
10	Robert Layton interviews Sir Adrian Boult The conductor discusses Vaughan Williams's Symphonies No in an interview broadcast on 31 March 1966	<b>8:25</b> is 3 and 4
11	Ursula Vaughan Williams reminisces His widow shares memories of Vaughan Williams in an interview broadcast on 1 April 1965	6:47
		TT 78:11

Susan Gritton soprano<sup>†</sup> Gerald Finley baritone<sup>†</sup> Rebecca Evans soprano<sup>‡</sup> Mari Eriksmoen soprano¶ London Symphony Chorus<sup>†</sup> Joseph Cullen chorus director Bergen Philharmonic Choir¶ Håkon Matti Skrede chorus master Edvard Grieg Kor¶ Håkon Matti Skrede chorus master London Symphony Orchestra\* Stephanie Gonley (No. 1) • Gordan Nikolitch (No. 2) • Markus Wolf (No. 3) • Michael Davis (Nos 6, 8) leaders Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra§ David Stewart (No. 7) • Alexander Kagan (No. 9) leaders Richard Hickox\* Sir Andrew Davis§

# **London Symphony Chorus**

soprano
Pamela Buckley\*
Carol Capper
Jenny Chant\*
Ann Cole\*
Shelagh Connolly
Gabrielle Edwards

Lorna Flowers Eileen Fox

Gabriella Galgani Jane Goddard Karen Goldstraw Elizabeth Graham\*

Joanna Gueritz\*
Carolin Harvey
Emily Hoffnung†
Gladys Hosken
Claire Hussey\*
Katrina Hyde

Cinde Lee Sophie Lloyd Jane Morley Jeannie Morrison\* Jennifer Norman

Debra Jones\*†

Jane O'Regan Maggie Owen\* Ann Pfeiffer Susan Pollard\* Carole Radford\* Clodagh Riordan Emily Rogers\* Stephanie Rumpelt\* Melissa Scott\*

Liz Smith Amanda Thomas\* Ruth Wheal\*

alto

Primrose Arnander Sarah Baird\* Mary Baker\*† Elizabeth Boyden

Jo Buchan\*†
Jane Cargin\*
Sarah Castleton
Rosemary Chute
Yvonne Cohen
Zoe Davis\*

Maggie Donnelly\* Diane Dwyer Linda Evans\* Lydia Frankenburg Christina Gibbs Dee Home\* Elizabeth Iles\* Jenny Kennedy Susan Lee Selena Lemalu Robert Ward Belinda Liao\* Nelson Wu

Rita Marson\*

Aoife McInerney\* bass

Helen Palmer David Armour
Clare Rowe\* Andy Chan
Lis Smith\* Stephen Chevis\*
Jane Steele Alastair Forbes\*
Curzon Tussaud Robert French
Tricia Wallis Robert Garbolinski\*†
Nimmi Weeks\* John Graham\*

Mimi Vadeh\*

Robin Hall\*

Bryan Hammersley

tenor Owen Hanmer\*†
Paul Allatt\* Christopher Harvey\*
Michael Buckley Jean-Christophe Higgins\*
Lorne Cuthbert\* Derrick Hogermeer\*
John Farrington Anthony Howick\*†

Andrew Fuller\*†

Warwick Hood\*
Anthony Instrall
David Leonard
John Marks\*
John Moses

Alan Rochford\*

Malcolm Nightingale\*
Panos Ntourntoufis
Nicholas Seager\*
Harold Raitt
Kevin Rigg
Paul Warburton
Peter Sedgwick
Graham Steele
Malcolm Rowat\*
Nicholas Seager\*
Edwin Smith†
Kevin Rigg
Paul Warburton
John Wareing
Richolas Weekes

Malcolm Taylor\*

James Warbis\*† \*indicates Semi-chorus / †indicates member of Council



Richard Hickox

# Vaughan Williams: Complete Symphonies

A Sea Symphony (Symphony No. 1)

In the early years of the twentieth century, the sea was a popular subject for composers -Elgar's Sea Pictures (actually 1899), Debussy's La Mer, Stanford's Songs of the Sea, and Frank Bridge's The Sea being obvious examples. Another preoccupation for British composers was the poetry of the American Walt Whitman. Settings by Stanford, Charles Wood, and others paved the way for Delius, Holst, Harty, and especially for Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 - 1958), who brought both these inspirations together in A Sea Symphony. He had been introduced to Whitman's work by Bertrand Russell while they were undergraduates at Cambridge. It was an enthusiasm that never cooled. In 1903 he began to sketch a Whitman choral work tentatively called Songs of the Sea, the start of the six-year gestation of the symphony. Between then and its completion, in 1909, Vaughan Williams collected hundreds of folksongs, edited The English Hymnal, wrote three Norfolk Rhapsodies, studied with Ravel, and, in Toward the Unknown Region, set to music another Whitman text. The Scherzo and slow movement of what was, for a while, entitled Ocean Symphony were sketched first,

followed by parts of the first movement and finale. In 1906 he wrote a movement for baritone and women's chorus called 'The Steersman', but discarded it. He knew by now that he was no longer composing a cantata but a full-scale choral symphony (for soprano, baritone, chorus, and orchestra) which at that date had few, if any, predecessors. Much of the music is an evocation of the sea, particularly 'The Waves', but in the other movements the sea becomes a metaphor for a voyage into eternity.

Vaughan Williams conducted the first performance (for a fee of twenty guineas), on 12 October 1910, his thirty-eighth birthday, at the Leeds Festival, where Toward the Unknown Region had been such a success in 1907; the symphony was included in an evening concert in which the other work was the Second Piano Concerto by Rachmaninoff, with the composer as soloist. Its rapturous reception left no doubt that Vaughan Williams was now the leading English figure in the post-Elgar generation. Imagine the thrill for that first audience of hearing the work's wonderful opening - the fanfare on the brass followed by the full chorus's exultant 'Behold, the sea itself'. Themes from this introduction recur in various guises throughout the work. The theme for the line 'And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships' was lifted from an early symphonic poem, The Solent, and would reappear nearly fifty years later, in the Ninth Symphony. This visionary passage is followed by jauntier, more obviously nautical music, introducing the baritone's thoughts of ships, waves, flags, and 'a chant for the sailors of all nations'. When she enters, the soprano too invokes the idea of flags and ship signals but introduces a more sombre mood with her mention of the 'soul of man' and of 'one flag above all the rest', 'emblem of man elate above death' and a 'token of all... [who] went down doing their duty'. Here the music of the introduction underpins a great choral climax. It is this ideal of a 'pennant universal' waving over 'all brave sailors, all seas, all ships' that brings the movement to a guiet ending with a reminiscence by the soloists of the 'Behold, the sea' theme.

The slow movement is a nocturne for the baritone, accompanied first by the semichorus (an innovation borrowed from Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*) and later by the full chorus. Dark and ambiguous harmonies create a mystical atmosphere as the soloist, standing on the shore under the bright stars, ponders 'the clef of the universes and of the future', his words echoed by the semi-chorus of women's voices. Horns introduce a quicker episode as the baritone and chorus contemplate the 'vast similitude' interlocking all. At the thought

of this, the music grows more ecstatic until the baritone's opening music returns and, like many another Vaughan Williams symphonic movement, this poetic movement ends quietly.

Philosophical meditation is banished from the Scherzo, which catered for the virtuosity of the Leeds chorus. The soloists are silent and it is left to the full chorus to describe the winds and waves 'laughing and buoyant, with curves'. The fanfare with which the work opened is recalled and two folksongs, 'The Golden Vanity' and 'The Bold Princess Royal', are quoted. The trio section is a grand and broad Parryesque tune depicting 'the great vessel sailing' and the waves following in its wake. The last two bars of the movement, in which the chorus shouts 'following' after the orchestra has stopped, were cribbed, on the composer's admission, from the end of the Gloria of Beethoven's Mass in D.

The finale is the longest, most ambitious, and – 'sprawling and formless', as some have found it – most moving section of the symphony. It is heavily indebted – and no worse for it – to Elgar's *Gerontius*, as Vaughan Williams acknowledged, citing the phrase 'Thou art calling me' which can be heard in the rapturous orchestral passage (with organ) that concludes the introductory section, 'O vast rondure, swimming in space'. Next, a modal episode takes us to the Garden of Eden and the creation of humankind. 'Wherefore, unsatisfied

soul?' the semi-chorus asks, to be answered by the full chorus in the declaration.

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his

This is the cue for the return of the soloists, excited at first but turning to a lyrical meditation on 'silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death'. This is the emotional core of the symphony. They are rejoined by the chorus, also in visionary mood; the end of the voyage is near. 'Away, 0 soul! Hoist instantly the anchor!' sets off an outburst of shanty-like rhythms but soon subsides into a calmer vein as the soloists sing, '0 farther, farther sail!' and the music recedes from our hearing like a ship disappearing over the horizon.

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A London Symphony (Symphony No. 2)

It was George Butterworth who first suggested to Vaughan Williams that he should write an orchestral symphony, and after the tragic death of Butterworth, Vaughan Williams dedicated A London Symphony to his memory. The work was finished by the end of 1913 and first performed, in the Queen's Hall, in London, on 27 March 1914, conducted by Geoffrey Toye. Following the loss of the full score, in Germany in 1914, Vaughan Williams, Butterworth,

Geoffrey Toye, and E.J. Dent reconstructed it from the orchestral parts, and the first performance of the reconstruction took place on 11 February 1915, under Dan Godfrey. Vaughan Williams revised the symphony three times: in 1918, 1920, and 1933, and the well-known 'Revised Edition' was published in the mid-1930s. This CD presents the world première recording of the first, 1913 version.

Listening to this original conception of A London Symphony is both exciting and surprising. Exciting in that there is around twenty minutes of extra music from a time when Vaughan Williams was writing works of freshness and lyricism, including The Lark Ascending (1914); in these original pages of A London Symphony there is much that is magical and poetic. Surprising in that his first conception of the symphony seems different – more mysterious, more wistful; it is obviously less taut but, through his revisions, Vaughan Williams achieved greater structural coherence at the expense of passages of tenderness, beauty, and originality.

This original conception of A London Symphony seems to reinforce the apparent influence of H.G. Wells's novel Tono-Bungay on the work. Vaughan Williams had pointed to this influence in a letter to Michael Kennedy in 1957. Tono-Bungay was written in 1909 and deals with big issues – ambition, personal relationships, the march of science – set

against the background of a rapidly changing London. For Wells, London was

a thing of white and yellow and red jewels of light and wonderful floods of golden illuminations and stupendous and unfathomable shadows

The end of the novel would have appealed to Vaughan Williams's visionary and philosophical nature. Wells contemplates:

The last great movement in the London Symphony in which the true scheme of the old order is altogether dwarfed and swallowed up... Light after light goes down. England and the Kingdom, Britain and the Empire, the old prides and the old devotions, glide abeam, astern, sink down upon the horizon, pass – pass. The river passes – London passes, England passes...

Vaughan Williams captures this vision of the passing of old England in the Epilogue to A London Symphony. This is more pronounced in the original version, which further emphasises the mysteriousness and sense of the unknown so well described in Tono-Bungay.

No wonder many of the composer's friends regretted the cuts. Sir Arnold Bax referred to his sadness at

the loss of a mysterious passage of strange and fascinating cacophony with which the first version of the Scherzo closed.

R.O. Morris, writing in 1920, referred to a questioning and 'a weariness' in the original version of the work. Bernard Herrmann felt

that the deleted bars in the slow movement removed some of 'the most original poetic moments in the entire symphony', the 'magic and beauty' of which captured something of London that was lost in the revised edition. Through this historic recording, we can now judge for ourselves.

What changed and why did Vaughan Williams do it? The first movement was never revised in any way. In the slow movement there was a short reduction in the exposition after the eighth bar and, later, more significant omissions of solos for oboe, viola, and horn. Much of this is quite beautiful, having 'folk-like' qualities, including a lovely Elizabethan-style melody. An atmospheric six-bar passage for wind with string accompaniment was deleted too, which was probably the cut to which Bernard Herrmann was referring. There were more deletions in what in the revised version is shown as passages K to L (pages 93 to 95). In the Scherzo (Nocturne) an episode in B major and a second trio, in 3/4 time, were deleted, including several passages hinting at folksong. The second trio stands in strong contrast to the rest of the movement, the overall effect of which changes from jaunty to more subdued. In the finale, cuts were substantial. The development section of the *Andante con* moto was shortened and thirty-nine bars were dropped at letter M. This includes a remarkable Andantino section - probably the greatest

loss in the revised edition – which also briefly reappears prior to the re-introduction of the Westminster chimes. Most significantly, there is much extra music for strings, woodwind, and brass, *pianissimo*, in the Epilogue, recalling earlier themes but in a mysterious and remote way.

So why did Vaughan Williams make these changes? He undoubtedly felt that the original version was too long, and he told Bernard Herrmann that the middle of the symphony contained 'some horrible modern music awful stuff'. Vaughan Williams, in 1920, was developing a more concise style of symphonic writing, which would find expression in the Pastoral Symphony, completed in June 1921. There the texture is more continuous, the mood absorbed and contemplative, and the impact understated until the emotional release of the fourth movement. Vaughan Williams, reflecting on his experiences as a soldier in the Royal Army Medical Corps, at Écoivres, near Arras, in Northern France, in 1916, achieves remarkable concentration, organic growth and subtlety in the Pastoral Symphony. After the war his kaleidoscopic and picturesque London Symphony may have seemed to him both overindulgent and episodic.

Vaughan Williams would have been influenced, too, by George Butterworth's observations on this symphony, published in the Royal College of Music magazine in 1914.

Butterworth, in a very positive article overall, wrote:

The Finale is the longest of the four movements; perhaps, also, it is the least satisfactory; not that there is any falling off in the interest but... there is a feeling that the composer is straining himself to express just a little too much...

Writing in 1920, Vaughan Williams sought to distance himself also from the idea of A London Symphony as a descriptive piece. He said, 'The music is intended to be self-expressive, and must stand or fall as absolute music'. He described the 'Westminster chimes', of the first movement, and the 'lavender cry', in the slow movement, as 'accidents'. Substantial cuts to the score to provide the work with greater structural coherence strengthened the work's claims to being 'absolute' music. Despite all this, Vaughan Williams retained the 'Westminster chimes' and in a 1925 programme note went on to provide more detailed and colourful information about the locations in London which had stimulated the music, such as Bloomsbury Square for the slow movement and The Strand for the Scherzo. The composer would remain very fond of his Second Symphony throughout his long life.

Vaughan Williams said that he preferred to refer to the work as a 'Symphony by a Londoner'. Although he was born in the village of Down Ampney, in Gloucestershire, and both went to school and lived for many years in Surrey, he was a Londoner at heart. He had moved into 13, Cheyne Walk, in Chelsea, in 1905, and from his study here enjoyed views over Battersea Park and The Thames. Cheyne Walk, in the years before the First World War, was a picturesque part of London, atmospheric, with an air of repose and seclusion. Yet within easy distance was the bustle of Piccadilly, the elegance of Belgravia, and the more dubious area between Westminster and Vauxhall Bridge once known as Tothill Fields. Here were bull-baiters, dogfighters, fairgrounds, and many a colourful and riotous tavern. Vaughan Williams would have known such aspects of London, and their contrasting impressions are evoked in A London Symphony.

The slow introduction presents the City asleep. At dawn the harp strikes the half hour of the Westminster chimes. The following Allegro risoluto section, triple forte, is all hustle and bustle. The second subject, given to woodwind and brass, continues the high-spirited mood. Ultimately, we pause for breath, and Vaughan Williams introduces a magical episode, delicately scored for string sextet and harp. After these moments of reflection the movement ends with a vivacious affirmation of its earlier themes.

Vaughan Williams called the slow movement 'Bloomsbury Square on a November afternoon'.

It begins with widely spaced chords for muted strings, from which the cor anglais intones a mysterious threnody. A gentle horn solo rises from throbbing strings and the music becomes more impassioned before the expressive string and horn passage returns. From a moment's silence a solo viola emerges to introduce a plaintive arabesque. It is a special moment, deeply characteristic of Vaughan Williams. A lovely Elizabethan-style melody then prefaces the lavender-seller's cry; the jingle of hansom cabs is caught in the mist. From these atmospheric origins the music grows to a wonderful climax, revealing again the ardour and passion in Vaughan Williams's music. As this in turn subsides, the 'Elizabethan melody' and fragments of folk-inflected songs reappear. The string writing is veiled and remote, confirming Bernard Herrmann's comments that these were amongst the most poetic moments in the symphony. Finally, the horn and throbbing strings, together with a lone viola, bring a soulful conclusion.

The third movement, an Allegro vivace Scherzo, is marked 'Nocturne'. This is London at night, jaunty, even garish. Two scherzo themes provide the principal subject matter, the first marked fugato and the second rather cheeky and catchy, reminiscent of accordion playing, perhaps in one of those ubiquitous taverns. After a considerable climax we

now hear the strange passage to which Bax referred, which provides the movement with a shadowy, almost ghostly quality. A violin solo leads to more original and inventive music after which the jaunty mood returns, this time less innocent, more worldly-wise. Here is perhaps the 'weariness' to which R.O. Morris referred in 1920. The movement ends quietly.

The fourth movement opens with a sudden cry of unexpected anguish. Vaughan Williams knew the darker side of London, 'the town built ill'. He had, as Blake before him, seen the 'Marks of weakness, marks of woe'. A solemn march creates an elegiac atmosphere which builds to an immense climax. In this original version we now have new, rather agitated passages for strings, followed by a recapitulation of earlier themes. Then comes that quite remarkable and memorable Andantino section, for strings and woodwind, of such tender sadness. The first movement Allegro then returns, building to another fierce climax. The streets clear, and the harp sounds the three quarters of the Westminster chimes. Finally, the extended Epilogue provides a wistful summary of all that has gone before, capturing the passing of the river and perhaps the passing of the old London. A calm is attained, and the symphony ends peacefully.

After the first performance of the original version, heard on this CD, Gustav Holst, a close friend of the composer's, wrote to Vaughan

Williams, saying, 'You have really done it this time!' How right he was.

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Chairman

Ralph Vaughan Williams Society

#### Twenty Years of Revisions

The first mention of A London Symphony occurs in a letter from Vaughan Williams to Cecil Sharp in July 1911.1 'I am in the middle of a great work,' he wrote, '& unless I get stuck in it I don't want to leave it'. This suggests that he may even have begun to compose it as early as 1910. His friend George Butterworth had urged him to write a symphony, so some sketches for a symphonic poem about London were looked out and 'thrown into symphonic form'. When the opportunity arose for a first performance, on 27 March 1914, Vaughan Williams was abroad and unable to make last-minute changes to the score himself, so Butterworth and two friends undertook to do so and made a 'short score'. Butterworth handled the finale. 'There was a passage which troubled him very much,' Vaughan Williams wrote later,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr Hugh Cobbe for providing me with material which will appear in his forthcoming edition of Vaughan Williams's letters.

but I could never get him to say exactly what was wrong with it; all he would say was 'It won't do at all'.

The day after the first performance Butterworth wrote to Vaughan Williams that he was 'frightfully glad' that

you have at last achieved something worthy of your gifts... I really advise you not to alter a note of the Symph. until after its second performance (which is bound to come soon) – the passages I kicked at didn't bother me at all, because the music as a whole is so definite that a little occasional meandering is pleasant rather than otherwise. As to the scoring, I frankly don't understand how it all comes off so well, but it does all sound right, so there's nothing more to be said.

This kind of candid criticism was what Vaughan Williams liked and wanted. It was what cemented his friendship with Gustav Holst, and he received it, too, regarding A London Symphony, from Arnold Bax when they were discussing the new work before the first performance.

One passage disappointed me and I asked his advice. He suggested the addition of a counter-melody on the oboe. Indeed, he sat down at the pianoforte and improvised one. This actual passage was too obviously Baxian to make its inclusion possible. But, following his advice, I made up another which, though not nearly so good as his,

was more in keeping with the rest of the movement.

One can only speculate which melody this is. The general critical reception of the symphony was favourable. Friends such as the tenor Steuart Wilson were ecstatic ('not one of us is worthy to sit in the same room as you in this world'), but the composer himself according to the critic A.H. Fox Strangways went about, when it was over, 'asking friends to tell him what to cut out'. So it is clear that he was dissatisfied with it from the start (as he was with most of his works). Within a week of the first performance he had an inquiry from Paris about a projected performance in a concert at the Châtelet Théâtre Musical. There was also mention of one in November in Edinburgh, but neither performance materialised. At some point during this period the manuscript full score was sent to Germany, whence it never returned. Was it really sent to Germany after war had been declared, on 4 August 1914? Presumably it had, because it must have been needed for a performance in Harrogate on 12 August 1914. At any rate, Butterworth organised a reconstruction from the original parts with the help of Vaughan Williams, E.J. Dent, and Geoffrey Toye (who had conducted the first performance). It is from this score that the present recording was made, by permission of Mrs Vaughan Williams, the permission given for a recording only.

The same score was used in Bournemouth in 1915, and on 18 February 1918 when Adrian Boult conducted and the composer was present. It was after this occasion that the long process of revision began. Boult planned a repeat performance for 18 March and Vaughan Williams wrote to him late in February:

I agree with you that the last movement & possibly the scherzo... are too long - but it is re-writing they want - I do not think that mechanical cutting, however skilfully done, wd. be satisfactory.

Prior to 18 March, before going back to France, Vaughan Williams made some cuts and changes for this fifth performance. He made more cuts and revisions for a performance conducted by Albert Coates on 4 May 1920, and this was followed by publication of the score, the same year. He made yet further revisions in 1933 - 'some of the bad bits were cut out', Vaughan Williams said - and a few more in 1934. The revised full score appeared in 1936, but some of the 1920 orchestral parts continued to circulate in the United States, which is why Eugene Goossens's 1941 recording, with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, contains passages which were no longer heard in Britain.

There can be no question of the original version supplanting the revision. The 1936 score represents the symphony as Vaughan Williams wanted it to exist for posterity. The

cuts and re-scorings were his own decisions, not forced on him, as revisions had often been on Bruckner, by well-meaning friends. Vaughan Williams would, and did, ask for advice, but never took it against his own inclinations. However, this does not prevent our savouring and relishing the first version in all its sprawling glory. One can hear why Bernard Herrmann and Bax mourned the loss of certain episodes. Undoubtedly, the conciseness of the revision is a gain, but the work in its pristine form, if I may again make a comparison which Vaughan Williams would have abhorred, is even more 'Mahlerian' in its generous ability to 'embrace everything'. The changes between 1914 and 1936 are excellently summarised by Stephen Connock in this booklet and may be traced in detail in my Catalogue.

Why did Vaughan Williams 'tinker' for twenty years with his own favourite among his symphonies? I think he felt it was too atmospheric, too descriptive, and he shied away from the term 'programme-symphony'. Hence his preference for the title 'Symphony by a Londoner', forgetting its origin as a tone poem. There is a strong clue to this in his reaction to the detailed descriptive programme note signed by Albert Coates (though in fact written by his wife, Madelon). Vaughan Williams told a correspondent in 1923 that Coates's notes were 'unauthorised'. But Mrs Coates told Percy Scholes in 1924 that she wrote the note

according to the pictures which Vaughan Williams told us [in 1920] that he had had in mind whilst composing. We dug the information out of him (it wanted some digging!)... I have faithfully kept to the pictures as he described them... Vaughan Williams allowed us to publish the information in America, but I think that he does not care for people over here to know all this... He has some rather peculiar views about this symphony being listened to simply as music without any accompanying pictures at all. Personally I think he is wrong as the pictures he had in mind are so poetic...

Most of us would agree, but it is the age-old argument about 'absolute' and programme music. By 1925, Vaughan Williams had relented somewhat, because he himself wrote a note which, although still insisting on 'absolute' music, identified Bloomsbury Square, The Strand, and other landmarks. The simple truth is that it is 'A London Symphony' and that says it all.

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### Pastoral Symphony (Symphony No. 3)

Why did Vaughan Williams call his Third Symphony 'Pastoral Symphony'? Certainly not to invite a comparison with Beethoven. There are no imitation bird calls, no thunderstorm, and no 'awakening of happy feelings on arriving in the countryside'. Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony* begins with flutes and bassoons playing oscillating triads in level quavers, followed by a solo violin accompanied by *tremolando* chords. The mood is gently elegiac, and there lies the clue. The symphony is directly related to the First World War, of 1914 – 18. Although forty-one when war was declared, Vaughan Williams enlisted as a private, in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and served in France. Like many others, he never spoke afterwards of the horrors which he had witnessed there, but they left their mark.

He began this symphony in earnest shortly after his return to civilian life and completed it by June 1921 (the scoring was slightly revised in 1950 – 51). The composer never publicly gave any clues to what lay behind the work, leaving its title to mislead most commentators into portraying it as a kind of Cotswold rhapsody or a distillation of English folksong (partly true), and into making silly remarks about cows looking over gates or "VW rolling over and over in a ploughed field". To his future wife, Ursula, he confided in 1938:

It's not really lambkins frisking at all, as most people take for granted... It's really wartime music – a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night with the ambulance wagon at Écoivres and we went up a steep hill and there was a wonderful Corot-like landscape in the sunset.

So the 'Pastoral' label is explained: not the Cotswolds, but battle-scarred France. Ironic, perhaps. It is characteristic of Vaughan Williams that what might be called his 'war requiem' is not full of trumpets and drums, nor of angry harmonic dissonances, but looks above the battle to the transcendence of sunsets and Corot, expressed in undulating chords and the clarity of sound which he learned from Ravel – how apposite that the French landscape should be painted in Ravelian tone colours and bitonality.

Yet, for all the apparent tranquillity, the ear will detect darker undercurrents which allude to the war. The poignant horn solo accompanied by muted strings, which opens the second movement, is followed by a cadenza for E flat trumpet playing only natural notes. This evokes Vaughan Williams's memory of a bugler practising on Salisbury Plain and sounding the seventh in mistake for the octave, but it also plainly refers to the 'Last Post', and provokes an impassioned outburst in E flat for woodwind and strings before the 'Last Post' theme returns on a natural horn.

Vaughan Williams described the scherzo as 'of the nature of a slow dance', although it ends with some fast and mysteriously quiet music. Some of the material was sketched before 1914, when Vaughan Williams was music director at Stratford-upon-Avon and was contemplating a setting of Falstaff and the fairies in the

Windsor Forest scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* 

The most overtly emotional movement of the symphony is its finale. Its unrestrainedly impassioned central outburst might be the Écoivres sunset, but it seems to me to represent the composer's reaction to the loss of friends – the musical counterpart to the words that he wrote to Gustav Holst:

I sometimes dread coming back to normal life with so many gaps.

The finale begins and ends with a vocalise for solo soprano, first heard over a very soft drum roll but unaccompanied when it returns. So the human voice intrudes upon the landscape, but it is an ethereal, transcendental voice. Is it a girl singing over the killing fields, or something more mystical? Elgar, in the second of his wartime recitations with orchestra, *Une voix dans le désert* (1915), hit upon the same poignant device of a girl's song. It is unlikely that Vaughan Williams ever heard Elgar's piece, but it is nevertheless curious that two of the greatest English composers should have used a similar method of conveying wartime emotion as recollected in a kind of tranquillity.

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Symphony No. 4 in F minor

The dissonance and harshness of Symphony

No. 4 by Vaughan Williams took many listeners by surprise when Adrian Boult conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the first performance, in Queen's Hall, London, on 10 April 1935. Yet this should not have been the case. A tougher harmonic idiom had been detectable in his oratorio Sancta civitas (1923 - 25), in the Piano Concerto, composed between 1926 and 1931, and in the 'masque for dancing' Job (1930). Vaughan Williams began to write the symphony in 1931 and completed it in 1934. As early as 6 January 1932 enough was ready to be played through on two pianos to Holst, a customary procedure of Vaughan Williams's. While Holst was in America, in April of that year, he wrote to RVW,

How's the new Sym.? When I get home in July, I want a 2-piano field day of both old and new versions,

so we can deduce that Holst had made various suggestions upon which Vaughan Williams had acted. He did not live to hear the finished work. Inevitably, the boisterous mood and

grinding opening discord of the symphony led commentators to interpret it as a reflection of the increasingly dangerous international situation, especially in Germany. But writing to a friend in 1937, Vaughan Williams emphatically denied this. I wrote it', he said,

not as a definite picture of anything external, e.g. the state of Europe, but simply because it occurred to me like that. The only clue he gave as regards his inspiration was to tell friends that he began the symphony after he had read an account, in *The Times*, of a festival of contemporary music. A present-day critic at *The Times*, Geoff Brown, writing in the *RVW Society Journal* (No. 21, June 2001), has plausibly traced this article to 1 August 1931, when H.C. Colles wrote a retrospect of the previous week's festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music. Discussing trends in modern symphonic writing, Colles wrote:

They all rely on the same order of stimuli. The hearer is prodded into activity by dissonance, soothed by sentiment, overwhelmed by the power of a battering climax. The appeal is primarily sensuous, even though the composer makes play with formal processes of thematic development, such as *fugato*, basso ostinato or variations... Perhaps there is no new principle to be discovered and the only thing to do is to make good music on an old principle...

Reading that, Vaughan Williams may well have said to himself, 'Just like Beethoven in his Fifth Symphony', because in several respects RVW's Fourth Symphony emulates the ground plan of Beethoven's Fifth, as well as 'playing with the formal processes' of *fugato* and *ostinato*, and relying on 'the same order of stimuli' that Colles cited. It is a remarkable coincidence, and I believe that



Sir Andrew Davis

Mr Brown's exploratory digging has struck oil. Like so many other works, this symphony also contains an element of self-portraiture on the part of Vaughan Williams. Many of his friends recognised in it his outbursts of temper and his gusty humour and ribaldry. Perhaps that is why, at a rehearsal, Vaughan Williams said: 'I don't know if I like it, but it's what I meant.'

The first movement begins with two four-note phrases which run through the symphony as unifying motifs. The second subject is an ardent melody for strings ('soothed by sentiment'). This is elbowed aside by a march-like theme for horns and strings which, transferred to strings, in D flat, brings the movement to a sombre close. The slow movement is based on the second mottotheme, now heard on trumpets and trombones, then woodwind. Muted violins have a dirge-like theme over a plucked bass, which leads to a long and bleak flute solo. The Scherzo is rumbustious, and includes a trio in which RVW seems almost to parody his folk-dance style. As in Beethoven, a bridge passage erupts into the Finale's march-theme over an 'oompah' bass (RVW's term). There are reminiscences of the first movement, after which a fugal epilogue reaches 'a battering climax', bringing the return of the grinding opening bars of the work. The end slams a chord in F in our faces.

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#### Symphony No. 5 in D major

Although his upbringing brought Vaughan Williams close to Christian thinking, particularly through daily attendance at chapel service at Charterhouse, a Foundation Church of England school, his attitude to religion was ambivalent. As an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge in the early 1890s, with contemporaries such as Bertrand Russell, he became known as an atheist. Away from this particular social milieu, his attitude became less dogmatic. He was appointed organist at St Barnabas's Church, in London, in 1895 and for two years absorbed, first hand, good and bad church music. Though with only a handful of works to his name, his credentials were certainly sound enough for the composer to be invited, in 1904, to edit *The English Hymnal*. Although he cared little for his job as an organist, he did subsequently produce a handful of notable works for the organ, including the Prelude and Fugue in C minor, of 1921.

When studying hymn tunes, including English and Scottish sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Psalters, Vaughan Williams came across what he described as beautiful tunes by Gibbons, Tallis, and other Tudor composers. His music began to reflect these influences, showing, in works such as the Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, of 1910, identifiably spiritual and visionary qualities. These characteristics can also be

found in the *Hymn-tune Prelude on Song 13 by Orlando Gibbons*, and in the hymn *The Pilgrim Pavement*.

In 1906, Vaughan Williams had composed his first music to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and continued to work on his opera on this subject until 1951. He was deeply moved by Bunyan's simple, noble, and uplifting prose and its clear message for spiritual salvation. He reserved his most contemplative music for works derived from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, including the Fifth Symphony, *Valiant-for-truth*, and the *Twenty-third Psalm*.

Having composed his one-act opera The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains, in 1922, Vaughan Williams was working on a full-scale dramatisation of The Pilgrim's Progress in 1938. Believing that the 'morality' (as he later called it) might never be performed, he diverted some of the music into a new symphony – his fifth. To sharpen the association with Bunyan, he originally headed the third movement, 'Romanza', with the following quotation:

Upon this land stood a cross, and a little below a sepulchre. Then he said: 'He hath given me rest by His sorrows and life by His

The Symphony is suffused with that luminous quality which distinguishes Vaughan Williams's writing inspired by *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Some of the material in the Symphony is directly

taken from the opera, including passages in the 'Romanza', the lyrical music associated with the House Beautiful.

The Symphony was first produced at a Promenade Concert on 24 June 1943, the composer conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Following the calculated violence of the Fourth Symphony, this radiant music appeared, to many commentators at the time, as presaging an end to war, or, to others, as a serene benediction from a composer who was then turned seventy. Neither view was accurate – as has been noted above, the Symphony was begun in 1938 and Vaughan Williams would go on to write a further four symphonies.

The 'Preludio' opens with a gentle horn call, followed by the strings playing a modally inflected melody which immediately establishes a tranquil mood. A beautiful transition to E major greets an ecstatic second subject – a passage of great nobility. A more agitated Allegro section follows, with a troubled three-note descending phrase for woodwind and horns. A horn call marks the beginning of the recapitulation, focusing on the first theme – cantabile – after which the movement builds to a powerful climax. We glimpse the Celestial City before the movement ends as serenely as it began.

The Scherzo is, for the first time in a symphony by Vaughan Williams, placed second. The opening *Presto* for strings is

followed by a melody for flute and bassoon. The lumpish, snarling contribution from the brass is suggestive of Bunyan's shadowy Doleful Creatures. The movement ends with a light, mercurial section for flute, bassoon, and strings, perfectly setting the scene for the 'Romanza' to follow.

The beginning of the slow movement immediately suggests music of great depth and heartfelt experience. The opening string triads, marked pp to ppp, and poignant cor anglais solo are intensely expressive. We hear the Pilgrim's voice: 'He hath given me rest by His sorrows and life by His death.' An agitated section recalls the Pilgrim's piercing call: 'Save me, Lord! My burden is greater than I can bear.' By way of consolation, the horns and trumpets declare the cor anglais theme. A further moment of uncertainty and spiritual tension remains before the strings develop an *alleluia* phrase of increasing richness and expressiveness. The solo violin, solo horn, and strings end the movement on a note of quiet contentment and contemplation, all struggles resolved.

Vaughan Williams ends his Symphony with a Passacaglia. The cellos, soon joined by flutes, violins, and violas, play a gentle, spacious theme which is subject to considerable variation. An Allegro section follows, then trumpets and trombones proclaim the opening horn call, giving the work a cyclical unity. The Passacaglia theme returns, moving to

a climax for full orchestra. In a wonderful passage, the string theme from the first movement reappears and this heralds a coda of remarkable beauty and resolution – a vision of the Celestial City, of peace and tranquillity.

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Ralph Vaughan Williams Society

### Symphony No. 6 in E minor

Symphony No. 6 was the first of his symphonies to be wholly completed after Vaughan Williams had begun to write music for films. This is worth mentioning because two of the themes - one in the second movement, the other in the Epilogue - were written for, but not used in, the film Flemish Farm (1943). He began to compose the symphony in 1944, completing it in 1947, the three years spanning the last months of the Second World War and its aftermath. Discussion has raged ever since the first performance (given by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, on 21 April 1948) about the question whether the symphony has a 'programme'. One critic called it a war symphony and likened the pianissimo Epilogue to the vision of a world laid waste by atomic warfare. Another thought the violent and jazzy Scherzo was inspired by a tragic incident during the bombing of London.

Vaughan Williams emphatically denied all this and asked why he could not just have written 'a piece of music'. His own programme note is objectively analytical, and, of course, it is possible to hear the work as an investigation of tonic and dominant relationships and of the counterpointing of basic types of rhythms, but one cannot escape the impression that some kind of extra-musical drama or struggle is being described. This is undoubtedly why the work made so deep an impression on listeners and received one hundred performances within the first two years of its existence.

It opens with an explosive cascade of brass and strings, succeeded by a syncopated rhythmic episode and then by a more lyrical theme which is later presented in a luxuriously rich and romantic fashion. In the second movement a menacingly insistent three-note motif grows louder on trumpets and drums as it relentlessly approaches, like some evil apparition – a more economical version of the comparable episode in Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony. The Scherzo erupts like a hell's kitchen of wailing saxophones and suddenly subsides into a finale which never rises above a whisper, strings playing senza vibrato and the oboe lamenting or even perhaps offering hope. 'Whiffs of theme drift about', the composer said, and finally they drift into nothingness. He was pleased when a friend described this movement as 'an agnostic's

Paradiso' and he further conceded that he had in mind Prospero's words in *The Tempest*:

We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep.

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### Sinfonia Antartica (Symphony No. 7)

The ill-fated expedition of Captain Robert Falcon Scott to the South Pole in 1910 – 12 figures prominently in any list of British heroic failures. After years of preparation and then the endurance of terrible conditions, the team of five arrived at the Pole on 17 January 1912 only to find that the Norwegian Roald Amundsen had beaten them to it. Scott wrote in his diary:

All the day dreams must go; it will be a wearisome return.

It was much worse than wearisome. During a return journey of 850 miles the temperature dropped to -40 degrees Fahrenheit. The three surviving members of the team built their last camp on Monday 19 March and all died around 31 March 1912. They were just eleven miles from the safety of their base camp, at One Ton Depot.

It was inevitable that such a tragic story of high adventure would attract a film company and, in 1946, the director Charles Frend and the Ealing Studios Associate Producer Sidney Cole received the enthusiastic blessing of the Ealing boss, Michael Balcon, to start work on *Scott of the Antarctic*. John Mills was cast as Captain Scott. Ernest Irving, the music director of Ealing Studios, was briefed by Balcon and said:

It did not take me fifty seconds to decide whom I should suggest as composer of the music – Ralph Vaughan Williams.

The composer had already written music for five films, including 49th Parallel, in 1940. Vaughan Williams reacted favourably to the idea of providing music for Scott of the Antarctic. Despite reservations about Scott's organisation, he was inspired by the courage, leadership, and fortitude that Scott showed when faced with appalling conditions. The film was first shown at a Royal Command Performance at the Empire Theatre, London on 29 November 1948.

The Scott tragedy had made a profound impact on Vaughan Williams, such that he started work, in the summer of 1949, on a new symphony based on the film music. This became *Sinfonia Antartica*, his Seventh Symphony. It was finished by the end of 1951 and dedicated to Ernest Irving. Sir John Barbirolli conducted the first performance, in Manchester, on 14 January 1953, with Margaret Ritchie, a Vaughan Williams favourite, as the soprano soloist.

The symphony is in five movements and each movement is prefaced by an epigraph selected by Vaughan Williams.

#### 1. Prelude. Andante maestoso

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent...
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This... is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.
Shelley, Prometheus Unbound

The majestic opening subject, taken from the title sequence in the film, reveals the epic, vast, terrifying grandeur of the Antarctic. A slow marching theme, a motto which will return later in the symphony, suggests heroic efforts in the face of implacable natural forces and leads to a tremendous climax. Then what the composer called 'Antarctic shimmerings' form a prelude to a wordless soprano solo, accompanied by a chorus of sopranos and altos. Over xylophone, piano, and harp, the female voices add a disembodied element to the music, conjuring up icy wastelands, to which the wind machine contributes its own haunting atmosphere. A deep tolling bell is heard, a warning of dangers to come, and the keening voices return. A trumpet fanfare suggests some grounds for optimism as Man sets out to confound Nature.

# 2. Scherzo. Moderato

There go the ships, and there is that Leviathan:

whom thou hast made to take his pastime therein.

Psalm 104

The second movement develops from small thematic fragments, including a quiet but determined theme for four horns and harp. This is followed by a descending motif on woodwind, tuba, and cellos, representing whales ('that Leviathan'), and a jaunty tune for trumpet and trombone, suggesting the penguins. Superbly orchestrated, the movement ends, as Vaughan Williams put it,

softly on an indefinite chord for muted brass and celesta.

### 3. Landscape. Lento

Ye Ice-falls! ye that from the mountain's brow Adown enormous ravines slope amain – Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice, And stopped at once amid their maddest plunge! Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!

> Coleridge, Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of the Chamouni

The third is an atmospheric movement capturing the lonely landscape of snow and ice. The first section, cantabile, is given to the muted horns and flutes. After a climax, the pace slows again but there is a strong sense of menace in the striding octaves as Scott's

party toils toward the South Pole. A gentler theme for violins and cellos gives way all too readily to the relentless, treading theme, this time *fortissimo*. Suddenly and terrifyingly the full organ reveals the sheer, inaccessible, frozen, and impassable nature of the terrain. Ye Ice-falls!

#### 4. Intermezzo. Andante sostenuto

Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime, Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Donne, The Sun Rising

Vaughan Williams provides much-needed contrast in the fourth movement as the music recalls family and friends in England, 'where woods with anemones are in flower till May'. Four introductory harp chords launch a moving folk-like phrase on the oboe, which is followed by a theme for flute, then strings. However, the deep bell and bass drum intrude and the omnipotent theme from the first movement is heard again. The death of Captain Titus Oates is remembered in music of poignant understatement.

# 5. Epilogue. Alla Marcia, moderato (non troppo allegro)

I do not regret this journey... We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and

therefore we have no cause for complaint.

Captain Scott, Last Journal

A defiant flourish of trumpets, then horns, full brass, and finally strings suggests some optimism. An extended march follows, deriving from the opening theme of the Prelude, but in a quicker tempo. The deep bells, suddenly very soft, intimate the doom to come. A repeat of the opening flourish leads to a restatement of the majestic opening theme of the symphony. Finally, the solo soprano and chorus intone their wordless threnody over timpani and violas, as the music fades away, leaving only the bitter Antarctic wind.

In this symphony, Vaughan Williams created a universal musical response to the specific circumstances of Scott's epic failure at the South Pole. He distilled the essence of his feelings about Scott and the unyielding, frozen landscape of the Antarctic into a cogent symphonic whole. Employing a vast orchestra, the work showed the composer still growing, still innovating, still curious at the age of eighty.

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Vice President
Ralph Vaughan Williams Society

Symphony No. 8 in D minor
Symphony No. 8 is certainly the only one of

the symphonies of Vaughan Williams which can be said to be entirely abstract and to have no programmatic subtext of any kind. After it appeared, in 1956, when the composer was eighty-three, its comparative lightness and use of exotic percussion instruments led some commentators to underestimate the novelty of form and to miss the freshness of invention and the exploration of new paths. The music goes deeper than the mere jeu d'esprit it was thought to be. It was composed between 1953 and 1955 and is dedicated to Sir John Barbirolli, who conducted the first performance, in Manchester, on 2 May 1956 at a Hallé concert. The first movement, 'Fantasia', is among the most highly and skilfully organised of any that Vaughan Williams wrote. 'Seven variations in search of a theme', he described it, declaring, 'there is no definite theme'. However, there are three closely related principal motifs: (1) two rising fourths for trumpet, answered by vibraphone; (2) a flute melody; and (3) an impassioned outburst for strings. These constituent parts fascinatingly coalesce into a bewitching whole.

The 'Scherzo alla marcia' is scored for wind only and is a subtle treatment of march rhythm, piquant and witty. Again there are three motifs – for bassoons, for trumpets, and finally for flutes or other woodwind. They are treated fugally before a pastoral trio section intervenes. In the slow movement, 'Cavatina',

only strings are used. An astute critic noticed that the cellos' first theme may suggest a disguised version of the chorale '0 sacred head', used in Bach's St Matthew Passion, and wrote to Vaughan Williams, who admitted:

it suddenly occurred to me how lovely that chorale would sound on the cellos, so as far as I can remember, without deliberately adapting it, the two themes got mixed up in my mind.

There is something elegiac about the manner in which the movement revisits the musical atmosphere of Tallis and larks ascending.

For the finale Vaughan Williams commandeered 'all the available hitting instruments which can make definite notes' and 'all the 'phones and 'spiels I know'. He added tuned gongs to the score after attending a performance of Puccini's Turandot. Oddly, in view of the apparently joyful nature of this 'Toccata colle campanelle', Vaughan Williams described its opening as 'rather sinister', and Oliver Neighbour has pointed out a resemblance between the first subject and Holst's Remembrance Day hymn 'O valiant hearts', thus suggesting a tribute to human heroism, as in Sinfonia Antartica, behind the otherwise cheerful exuberance of music that is by any standards a remarkable achievement for an octogenarian.

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#### Symphony No. 9 in E minor

Vaughan Williams composed his ninth and last symphony between early 1956 and November 1957, well into his eighty-fifth year. It was first performed on 2 April 1958, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent, and dedicated to the Royal Philharmonic Society - he had received the Gold Medal from the Society way back in 1929. The composer continued with his exploration of unusual instrumental sonorities - heard to good effect in his Symphony No. 8, completed in 1955 - this time including three saxophones and one flugelhorn as well as a deep gong, bells, and glockenspiel. The flugelhorn, in particular, gives the slow movement of the symphony a mellow tone, and Vaughan Williams chose this instrument following a holiday in Austria and Germany in 1957. Whilst the composer was out in a boat on Königssee, the pilot suddenly stopped, turned off the engine, and produced a flugelhorn which he proceeded to play, the melody echoing off the mountains. Vaughan Williams said at the time: 'I shall put that in my symphony.'

Both Michael Kennedy and, in much more detail, Alain Frogley have shown that the Ninth Symphony was initially influenced by the Wessex countryside and, in particular, by Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. The sketch of the first movement was originally called 'Wessex Prelude' and the final movement was called 'Landscape'. 'Tess'

figures frequently in relation to the second movement. Whilst no titles appear in the final, published score, and the composer asserted that the programme 'got lost on the journey', the influence of *Tess* is real enough. Vaughan Williams thought *Tess* the greatest of Hardy's novels and, as Ursula Vaughan Williams put it with respect to the title character, 'he went for walks with her' for over fifty years of his long life. Ursula told me in 1996:

He was fascinated by Tess. When we visited Stonehenge, he could see Hardy's vision. He had a great feeling about the injustices of the Gods.

This last reference relates to Hardy's fatalistic closing lines:

Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals... had ended his sport with Tess.

The use of the tolling bells at the end of the second movement captures the poignant conclusion of Hardy's novel.

The Ninth Symphony has the same key, E minor, as the Sixth and also shares an enigmatic quality with the earlier symphony. We now know that the last movement of the Sixth was inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and something of Prospero's wisdom and insight can be found in Vaughan Williams's last symphony.

The first movement, *Moderato maestoso*, opens with an ominous theme which recalls the opening of the *Sinfonia Antartica* (completed

in 1951). It is led by trombones and tuba, then followed by horns. The gentle tone of the flugelhorn is also heard. Vaughan Williams tells us that this theme occurred to him 'after playing some of the organ part of the opening of Bach's St. Matthew Passion'. A cantabile melody soon follows, led by the clarinets, before the solemn, agitated music returns. This is, perhaps, an homage by Vaughan Williams to the memory of his close friend Gustav Holst and to Holst's Hardy-inspired work Egdon Heath. A dreamy, nostalgic passage for solo violin changes the mood, harp and pizzicato strings reminiscent of Elihu's 'Dance of Youth and Beauty' from Job. A period of concentrated, brooding calm follows, featuring cor anglais and flugelhorn.

The second movement, Andante sostenuto, opens with the flugelhorn playing a wistful, noble melody taken from the composer's early work The Solent (1903) and used again in A Sea Symphony (completed in 1909). This melody seems to have had a special significance for Vaughan Williams, suggesting the survival of the human spirit when faced with adversity. A more sinister theme emerges and grows in importance, and the noble and sinister themes struggle against each other. The noble theme seems to win through and ushers in a gentle, romantic episode suggestive of Hardy's Tess. The flugelhorn melody closes the movement quietly.

In the Scherzo, marked *Allegro pesante*, the side drums invoke the 'ghostly drummer of Salisbury Plain' whilst the trio of saxophones announces a jaunty, bluff theme. A repetition in a higher octave leads to two new themes, both of which are juxtaposed in a vigorous, sardonic manner which recalls Symphony No. 4 (1931 – 34). The music quietens to introduce a *fugato* and, as the composer puts it,

The various subsidiary themes are introduced in turn as counterpoints to the fugue subject.
The climax to the fugue is interrupted by a chorale-like tune for the three saxophones, a striking moment. The chorale is repeated, given fuller orchestral treatment, after which the saxophones and side drum have the final say.

The complex final movement, Andante tranquillo, is introduced without a break. This movement falls into two distinct parts. The first section opens, in a way which suggests the Epilogue of the Sixth Symphony, with a plaintive melody for violins. At the arrival of a broad, lilting theme, initially for brass but quickly taken up in expressive style by the strings, the mood changes. The second part of the movement opens with a lyrical melody for violas, which gradually develops contrapuntally into a forceful climax. After three powerful climaxes for full orchestra, within which the saxophones impart a visionary, unearthly, and luminous quality, the symphony ends enigmatically, in E major. After she had heard

the second performance of the work, Ursula Vaughan Williams said of this moment:

> I thought, well, that is the end of Ralph's life and I can see a turning point. It is leading out into another place. It is extraordinary.

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Vice President Ralph Vaughan Williams Society

At the time of his premature death at the age of sixty in November 2008, **Richard Hickox** CBE, one of the most gifted and versatile British conductors of his generation, was Music Director of Opera Australia, having served as Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales from 2000 until 2006 when he became Conductor Emeritus. He founded the City of London Sinfonia, of which he was Music Director, in 1971. He was also Associate Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, Conductor Emeritus of the Northern Sinfonia, and co-founder of Collegium Musicum 90.

He regularly conducted the major orchestras in the UK and appeared many times at the BBC Proms and at the Aldeburgh, Bath, and Cheltenham festivals, among others. With the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Centre he conducted a number of semi-staged operas, including Billy Budd, Hänsel und Gretel, and Salome. With the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra he gave the first ever complete cycle

of Vaughan Williams's symphonies in London. In the course of an ongoing relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra he conducted Elgar, Walton, and Britten festivals at the South Bank and a semi-staged performance of *Gloriana* at the Aldeburgh Festival.

Apart from his activities at the Sydney
Opera House, he enjoyed recent engagements
with The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, English
National Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, and
Washington Opera, among others. He guest
conducted such world-renowned orchestras as
the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre
de Paris, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen
Rundfunks, and New York Philharmonic.

His phenomenal success in the recording studio resulted in more than 280 recordings, including most recently cycles of orchestral works by Sir Lennox and Michael Berkeley and Frank Bridge with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the symphonies by Vaughan Williams with the London Symphony Orchestra, and a series of operas by Britten with the City of London Sinfonia. He received a Grammy (for Peter Grimes) and five Gramophone Awards. Richard Hickox was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Jubilee Honours List in 2002, and was the recipient of many other awards, including two Music Awards of the Royal Philharmonic Society, the first ever Sir Charles Groves Award, the Evening Standard Opera Award, and the Award of the Association of British Orchestras.

One of today's most recognised and acclaimed conductors. Sir Andrew Davis has enjoyed a career that spans more than fifty years, during which he has been the musical and artistic director at several of the world's most distinguished opera and symphonic institutions. These include Lyric Opera of Chicago (Music Director and Principal Conductor 2000 - 21), BBC Symphony Orchestra (Chief Conductor 1991 - 2004, now Conductor Laureate), Glyndebourne Festival Opera (Music Director 1988 - 2000), Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Chief Conductor 2013 - 19, now Conductor Laureate), and Toronto Symphony Orchestra (Principal Conductor 1975 - 88, now Conductor Laureate). He also holds the honorary title Conductor Emeritus from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Maestro Davis has performed at many of the world's important opera houses, among them The Metropolitan Opera, Teatro alla Scala, and Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and appeared with virtually every internationally prominent orchestra, including the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, and all the major British orchestras.

A vast and award-winning discography documents the artistry of Sir Andrew, his CDs including recordings of the works of Berlioz, Bliss, Elgar (winner of the 2018 Diapason d'Or de l'Année in the category Musique Symphonique), Finzi, Grainger, Delius, Ives, Holst, Handel (nominated for a 2018 GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance), and York Bowen (nominated for a 2012 GRAMMY® for Best Orchestral Performance). His lauded recordings with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus celebrating British composers were recently released as a 16-CD retrospective collection. He currently records for Chandos Records, with whom he has been an exclusive artist since 2009.

Born in 1944, in Hertfordshire, England, Maestro Davis studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was Organ Scholar before taking up conducting. His diverse repertoire ranges from baroque to contemporary works, and spans the symphonic, operatic, and choral worlds. He is a great proponent of twentieth-century music, including works by Janáček, Messiaen, Boulez, Elgar, Tippett, Britten, and Vaughan Williams, in addition to the core symphonic and operatic works.

In 1992, Sir Andrew Davis was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and in 1999 was designated a Knight Bachelor in the New Year Honours List. He is President of the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society and during 2022 is performing a large number of the composer's works across various countries.



Richard Hickox

#### COMPACT DISC ONE

### A Sea Symphony

No. 1. A Song for All Seas, All Ships

Behold, the sea itself,

in or out of port,

And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships; See, where their white sails, bellying in the

wind, speckle the green and blue, See, the steamers coming and going, steaming

See, dusky and undulating, the long pennants of smoke.

Today a rude brief recitative.

Of ships sailing the seas, each with its special flag or ship-signal,

Of unnamed heroes in the ships,

Of waves spreading and spreading far as the eye can reach,

Of dashing spray, and the winds piping and blowing,

And out of these a chant for the sailors of all nations,

Fitful, like a surge,

Of sea-captains young or old, and the mates, and of all intrepid sailors,

Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay.

Pick'd sparingly without noise by thee old ocean, chosen by thee,

Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time, and unitest the nations.

Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,

Indomitable, untamed as thee.

Flaunt out 0 sea your separate flags of nations! Flaunt out visible as ever the various shipsignals!

But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul of man one flag above all the rest,

A spiritual woven signal for all nations, emblem of man elate above death,

Token of all brave captains and all intrepid sailors and mates,

And all that went down doing their duty, Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid captains young or old,

A pennant universal, subtly waving all time, o'er all brave sailors,

All seas, all ships.

No. 2. On the Beach at Night, Alone

On the beach at night, alone,

As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,

As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future.

A vast similitude interlocks all,

All distances of space however wide,

All distances of time,

All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different,

All nations,

All identities that have existed or may exist, All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,

This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd,

And shall forever span them and shall compactly hold and enclose them.

### No. 3. Scherzo. The Waves

After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds, After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,

Below, a myriad, myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,

Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,

Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying, Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven,

emulous waves,
Toward that whirling current, laughing and

buoyant, with curves,
Where the great vessel sailing and tacking

displaced the surface,
Larger and smaller waves in the spread of the

ocean yearnfully flowing, The wake of the sea-ship after she passes,

flashing and frolicsome under the sun, A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many fragments,

Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.

## 4 No. 4. The Explorers

O vast rondure, swimming in space, Cover'd all over with visible power and beauty, Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,

Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and countless stars above, Below, the manifold grass and waters, With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention.

Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia descending, Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,

Wandering, yearning, with restless explorations, With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts, With that sad incessant refrain, Wherefore, unsatisfied soul? Whither 0 mocking life?

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children? Who justify these restless explorations? Who speak the secret of the impassive earth?

Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be carried out,
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.

After the seas are all cross'd,
After the great captains have accomplish'd
their work,

After the noble inventors,

0 we can wait no longer,

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name, The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

We too take ship 0 soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of
ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to
thee, I thee to me, 0 soul,)
Caroling free, singing our song of God,

O soul thou pleasest me, I thee,
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in
the night,

Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, like waters flowing, Bear me indeed as through regions infinite, Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over, Bathe me 0 God in thee, mounting to thee, I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes,
thou centre of them.

Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space
and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee 0 soul, thou
actual me,
And Io, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest con

Greater than stars or suns, Bounding O soul thou journeyest forth;

Space.

And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of

Away, 0 soul! Hoist instantly the anchor! Cut the hawsers - haul out - shake out every sail!

Reckless, 0 soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go.
O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy,
O farther, farther, farther sail!

Sail forth - steer for the deep waters only,

Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892)



Richard Hickox, conducting

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#### Chandos 24-bit / 96 kHz recording

The Chandos policy of being at the forefront of technology is now further advanced by the use of 24-bit/96 kHz recording. In order to reproduce the original waveform as closely as possible we use 24-bit, as it has a dynamic range that is up to 48 dB greater and up to 256 times the resolution of standard 16-bit recordings. Recording at the 44.1 kHz sample rate, the highest frequencies generated will be around 22 kHz. That is 2 kHz higher than can be heard by the typical human with excellent hearing. However, we use the 96 kHz sample rate, which will translate into the potentially highest frequency of 48 kHz. The theory is that, even though we do not hear it, audio energy exists, and it has an effect on the lower frequencies which we do hear, the higher sample rate thereby reproducing a better sound.

A **Hybrid SA-CD** is made up of two separate layers, one carries the normal CD information and the other carries the SA-CD information. This hybrid SA-CD can be played on most standard CD players, but will only play normal stereo. It can also be played on an SA-CD player reproducing the stereo or multi-channel DSD layer as appropriate.

With thanks to the Barbican Centre and the City of London (A Sea Symphony)

The performing edition of A London Symphony (1913 version) edited by Stephen Hogger

The recording of A London Symphony was made possible by kind permission of Ursula Vaughan Williams.

With special thanks to Carl Schuurbiers of Polyhymnia (A London Symphony)



The recording of Symphonies Nos 7 and 9 was made with support from



Recording producers Ralph Couzens (No. 1), Brian Couzens (Nos 2 – 6 and 8), and Brian Pidgeon (Nos 7 and 9)

Sound engineers Jonathan Stokes, Classic Sound (No. 1) and Ralph Couzens (Nos 2-9)

Assistant engineers Ian Watson (No. 1), Christopher Brooke (Nos 2 and 4), Michael Common (No. 3), Richard Smoker (No. 5), Matthew Walker (Nos 6 and 8), and Gunnar Herleif Nilsen, Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) (Nos 7 and 9)

Editors Rachel Smith (Nos 1-6 and 8) and Rosanna Fish (Nos 7 and 9)

Original mastering Ralph Couzens (No. 1)

**Digital remastering** Alexander James

A & R administrator Sue Shortridge

Recording venues Barbican Centre, London: 3 and 4 June 2006 (No. 1); All Saints' Church, Tooting, London: 18 and 19 December 2000 (No. 2), 16 – 18 January 2002 (No. 3), 8 and 9 January 2001 (No. 4), 28 October 1997 (No. 5) & 21 and 22 January 2003 (Nos 6 and 8); Grieghallen, Bergen, Norway: 30 January – 2 February 2017 (No. 7) & 2 – 4 and 6 May 2016 (No. 9)

Front cover Study (not dated) for the portrait of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1952) by Sir Gerald Festus Kelly (1879–1972), now at the Royal College of Music, London © Graham Salter/Bridgeman Images Design and typesetting Cass Cassidy

Booklet editor Finn S. Gundersen

Publishers Breitkopf & Härtel (rights assigned to Stainer & Bell 1926) (No. 1), © Ralph Vaughan Williams (No. 2), Faber Music Ltd (No. 3), Oxford University Press (Nos 4 – 9)

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This compilation @ 2022 Chandos Records Ltd

Digital remastering @ 2022 Chandos Records Ltd

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Chandos Records Ltd, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HX, England

Country of origin UK

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RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS