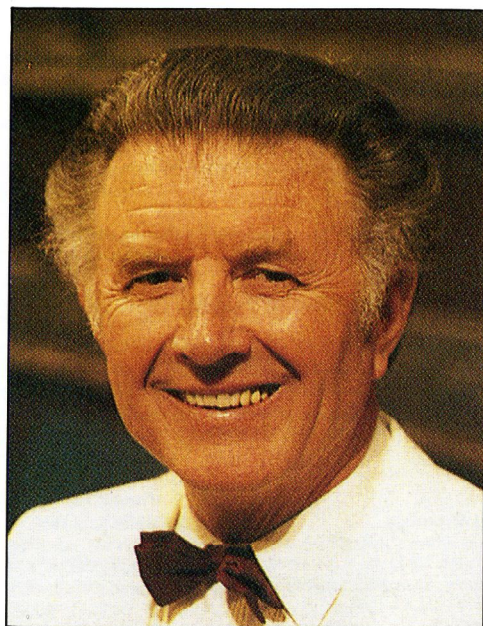


Chandos

CHAN 8570



Major Peter Parkes

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DIGITAL

Life Divine

4 Famous Test-pieces
conducted by
Major Peter Parkes
and Derek Broadbent

BLACK DYKE MILLS BAND (John Foster & Son PLC)



KENILWORTH (Bliss) • **THE THREE MUSKETEERS** (Hespe)
LABOUR AND LOVE (Fletcher) • **LIFE DIVINE** (Jenkins)

Life Divine

1 **LABOUR AND LOVE, Tone Poem (10:23)**

Percy E. Fletcher

***THE THREE MUSKETEERS, Suite (12:04)**

George Hespe

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)

KENILWORTH (9:08)

Sir Arthur Bliss

6 I At the Castle Gates (1:58)

7 II Serenade on the lake (2:12)

8 III March: Kenilworth (4:53)
(Homage to Queen Elizabeth)

9 ***LIFE DIVINE, Tone Poem (13:28)**

Cyril Jenkins

DDD TT = 45:27

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WITH 23 British Open Championship and 17 National Championship titles to its credit, not to mention six wins in the European Championship and one World Championship success, Black Dyke Mills 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 Championships at Crystal Palace, was a great 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 bandsmen as they struggled through the early stages of rehearsal.

William Halliwell, one of the all time 'Greats' (and a former professional conductor of Black Dyke Mills) 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 25 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 bandsmen, 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 Championships.

* Reports in the *British Bandsman* of the period suggest, however, that Fletcher actually submitted the tone poem speculatively, in response to a general call for "better music" from Herbert Whiteley, the newspaper's editor. Whiteley, a much underrated personality, was Iles' adviser on music matters and, recognising the potential of the Fletcher 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, 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 and direct. 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 Championships — 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 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 conducting 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' its romantic solo passages 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's four movements — dedicated to Hespe's four sons — 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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- Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens • Assistant Engineer: Philip Couzens
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