



WALTON

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Belshazzar's Feast

Christopher Purves, Baritone • Simon Lindley, Organ

Huddersfield Choral Society • Leeds Philharmonic Chorus • Laudibus

English Northern Philharmonia • Paul Daniel



William Walton (1902-1983)

Belshazzar's Feast • Crown Imperial • Orb and Sceptre

William Walton was born in Oldham, Lancashire, the second of four children of musical parents. His father, Charles, was a singing teacher, and the organist and choirmaster of St John's Church in Oldham, where, for a time, the young William sang; his mother, Louisa, was a fine amateur singer. From an early age Walton would have been exposed to amateur choral music-making and the great British choral tradition. He would have heard performances of the two pillars of the choral society repertoire, Handel's *Messiah* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Additionally, he would have been surrounded by the sound of brass bands, another flourishing amateur tradition particularly in the part of the country in which he was living. Both traditions were strongly to influence his composition later in life. His father, recognising in the boy a natural singer, decided he should try for a place in the choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. William was successful and at the age of ten he moved south to take up a place as a chorister. There he would have encountered a whole new and more rarefied choral tradition and his musical development came on apace. Indeed, at the age of only fifteen, he composed one of his finest church anthems, *A Litany* (Drop, drop slow tears), which shows a remarkably assured hand and which gives more than a hint of the mature Walton to come. He returned to Christ Church as an undergraduate, aged only sixteen, and pitched himself into the social life with characteristic zest. He left Oxford in 1920 without a degree but having made several influential and lifelong friends. He spent the next decade intermittently living in London with two of these friends, Osbert and Sacheverell Sitwell, gradually expanding his social and professional circle, gaining more cultural experience and composing with increasing confidence and brilliance (*Façade*, the *Viola Concerto* and the overture *Portsmouth Point*).

It was in 1929, having completed the *Viola Concerto*, that Walton decided he would write an

extended work for chorus and orchestra. Osbert Sitwell suggested as a subject the scene from the Bible (Book of Daniel) in which, at King Belshazzar's feast in Babylon, a hand appears and prophetically writes a doom-laden message on the wall. Sitwell himself put together the libretto, drawing verses from Daniel, Psalms 81 and 137, and from the Book of Revelations. It is clear from its early history that the concept grew from a work of relatively modest proportions to composition on a massive scale. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the BBC was emerging as a major patron of music, commissioning composers and establishing the BBC Symphony Orchestra. A BBC memo dated 12th January 1930 discusses three contemporary composers having been approached to write works: Walton, Constant Lambert and Victor Hely-Hutchinson. Each work was to be scored for "small chorus, small orchestra of not exceeding fifteen and soloist". It seems Walton had agreed to these limitations. Walton's subject was to be "Nebuchadnezzar or the Writing on the Wall". A further BBC memo dated 30th May revealed that Walton "has completed the composition of *Belshazzar ...* for two soloists, small chorus and small orchestra". However, by the beginning of September it had been generally agreed between the interested parties that the work had "grown to such proportions" that it would not be considered under the original scheme. Work on *Belshazzar's Feast* continued through 1930 and 1931 with varying degrees of success. At one time (from May to December) he was stuck on the word "gold", in the composer's words "unable to move either to right or left or up or down". Yet by the early months of 1931 he was "immensely happy ... doing a vast amount of work". It was around this time that it was announced that the work was to be given its first performance at that year's Leeds Festival. Although the Festival was being organized by Sir Thomas Beecham, it was to be Malcolm Sargent who would conduct the first

performance. As the Berlioz *Requiem* with all its vast battery of brass was also to be played at the Festival, Beecham suggested that Walton add more brass to the already heavily-scored orchestration, saying: "Well, my boy, as you will probably never hear this work again, you might as well chuck in a couple of brass bands". "I've always liked brass bands, so I did" was Walton's subsequent comment. The brass bands take the form of seven players in each group placed stage left and right of the orchestra. The first performance on 8th October 1931 was a phenomenal success with performers, audience and critics alike hailing a triumph. Given that Walton had composed no choral music since his teenage works at Oxford, the achievement is that much more astonishing and it was rightly welcomed as the finest large-scale choral work since Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* of 1900.

It was to Elgar, and specifically his five *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, that Walton looked when he was commissioned by the BBC to compose a Coronation March for the anticipated coronation of Edward VIII in November 1936. As it happened of

course, that event never took place, so the new work, *Crown Imperial*, was played at the coronation of George VI in Westminster Abbey on 12 May 1937 as Queen Mary, the Queen Mother, made her way down the aisle.

Such was the success of *Crown Imperial* that Walton was commissioned, some sixteen years later, to write another March for the coronation of Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953. Although the form of *Orb and Sceptre* is similar to his earlier march, the harmonic language has developed dramatically, the composer leaving the uncomplicated harmonies of *Crown Imperial* behind him for the more boldly chromatic.

The Elgar influence can be seen most readily in the structure of these two marches which both exude characteristic Waltonian joie de vivre and exuberance (albeit in a more formal and straightforward way in *Crown Imperial*) in the outer sections and both of which bring on the glorious, sweeping Big Tune as contrast in the trio sections.

Jeremy Backhouse

Christopher Purves

The baritone Christopher Purves was a choral scholar at King's College, Cambridge where he read English. On leaving Cambridge he spent four years performing and recording with the vocal harmony group Harvey and the Wallbangers. He then resumed vocal training with David Keren, Diane Forlano and Janice Chapman. He has appeared in concert throughout Europe, notably in Aix-en-Provence, Brussels, Nuremberg, Madrid and Tokyo, with festival appearances in Nîmes, Sablé, Turkey, Città del Castello, Luxembourg, Antwerp and Edinburgh. His operatic engagements range from the rôle of Plutone in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at the Palais Garnier to those of Superintendent Budd in Britten's *Albert Herring*, Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*, Cecil in *Maria Stuarda*, and the Executioner in the world première of Macmillan's *Ines de Castro*.

Simon Lindley

Simon Lindley is Organist of Leeds Parish Church and Leeds Town Hall. An extensive discography includes, for Naxos, French Organ Music from Leeds Parish Church and Handel Concertos with the Northern Sinfonia. One of the UK's most popular recitalists and concert organists, Simon was educated at Magdalen College School Oxford and the Royal College of Music. He is to be heard regularly in concerts, recordings and broadcasts as Organist with The Huddersfield Choral Society, the Orchestra of Opera North and many other leading choirs and orchestras and regular as accompanist to cornet virtuoso Phillip McCann and violinists Marat Bisengaliev and David Greed.

Huddersfield Choral Society

The most famous but not the oldest of the Yorkshire choral societies, the Huddersfield Choral Society was founded in 1836 by sixteen local musicians and recruited its members mainly from the mixed choirs of nonconformist churches. The choir is particularly well known for its performances of Handel's *Messiah*. The original society of about seventy singers and instrumentalists met monthly for rehearsals and gave quarterly performances for friends and subscribers. It started employing the services of professional orchestras on a regular basis in 1942 and in 1993, began an artistic collaboration with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra. Today the choir consists of around two hundred singers, having reached a peak of four hundred in the 1930s, and enjoys a wide repertoire that includes oratorio and sacred music together with concert opera, popular and contemporary music. Public performances play as important a part in the choir's musical calendar as its annual subscriber concert season. Under distinguished regular conductors which have included Sir Henry Coward, Sir Malcolm Sargent, Sir John Pritchard, Owain Arwel Hughes, Dr Jane Glover and Martyn Brabbins, and a series of well-known guest conductors, the choir has developed an international reputation for all that is best in the British tradition of amateur choral singing. In addition to its regular concerts in Huddersfield Town Hall, the choir has been a regular visitor to London since its first visit in 1887. It took part in the 1951 Festival of Britain celebrations in the Royal Festival Hall and in recent years has appeared in several Promenade concerts, while tours abroad have formed part of the choir's activities, since its first overseas tour to the Netherlands in 1928. The choir has a splendid record in commissioning new work from English composers, the most famous of which is Walton's *Gloria*, commissioned for its 125th anniversary in 1961. Other commissions include Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* and a series of works by contemporary composers. The choir's reputation is known beyond the concert hall through its many compact disc recordings, and its concerts are regularly broadcast by the BBC. The choir has also been featured on television on a number of important occasions.

Laudibus (Chorus Master: Mike Brewer)

Firmly established as one of the world's leading figures in choral music, Mike Brewer is in demand world-wide for vocal workshops and guest conducting of choirs. His regular trips include South Africa, Japan, Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as Europe and the United States. His regular commitment is to the National Youth Choir of Great Britain, of which he has been Musical Director since 1983 and with which he collaborated in a performance at the BBC Promenade Concerts of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* with the National Youth Orchestra. Mike Brewer also conducts the award winning chamber choir, *Laudibus*, an ensemble known for its recordings and overall winner in the 1998 Tolosa International Choral Competition.

Laudibus has a reputation as one of the finest chamber choirs in the world, and has quickly acquired a reputation for the breadth of its programming and its dynamic and exciting performances. Members of *Laudibus* are chosen by audition from the 130-strong National Youth Choir of Great Britain and the unique blend and flexibility of this energetic ensemble is born of many years' intensive work with their director Mike Brewer. Festival appearances have included Bath, Harrogate, Hexham and the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. World première performances have included the music of Gavin Bryars, Giles Swayne and Richard Allain. In January 2001 *Laudibus* was invited to take part in the National Holocaust memorial service, which was broadcast live on BBC television. *Laudibus* has already released several acclaimed recordings.

Leeds Philharmonic Society Chorus

Founded in 1870 the Leeds Philharmonic Chorus is a society of singers aiming to promote choral performances of the highest professional standards in Leeds and elsewhere. Over the years its Music Directors have included Sir Edward Bairstow, Sir Charles Groves, Richard Hickox, Sir Charles Mackerras, Sir Malcolm Sargent and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. It has also sung with other conductors including Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Edward Downes, Sir Alexander Gibson, Vernon Handley, Neeme Järvi, Libor Pešek, Sir Georg Solti, Yan Pascal Tortelier and Sir David Willcocks. As well as its series of concerts in Leeds Town Hall, the Chorus regularly performs in other venues including the Royal Albert Hall, Hull, Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, Newcastle, Northampton, Plymouth and Ripon. As would be expected from one of northern England's leading choruses, its repertoire is wide-ranging including both tradition and innovation and large and smaller-scale works with unfamiliar and demanding works being a frequent feature. In recent years performances have included Rachmaninov's *The Bells*, Mahler's *Symphony No 2*, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, Franz Schmidt's *The Book of the Seven Seals*, Delius's *A Mass of Life*, Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* and Pärt's *Te Deum*. The new millennium has seen the Chorus touring to the Czech Republic where its performances of Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* and Mozart's *Requiem* were so well-received that further overseas tours are being planned. Members from the Chorus took part in the first performance of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* as part of the chorus especially assembled for the 1931 Leeds Triennial Music Festival. The Chorus continues to take part in early performances of new works including, more recently, the first broadcast performance of Geoffrey Burgon's *Requiem*. The Chorus makes regular broadcasts on Radio 3 including Berlioz's *Grande Messe des Morts*, Mendelssohn's *St Paul*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Verdi's *Requiem* and Elgar's *The Kingdom*. In July 1998 the Chorus took part in Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* at the Cheltenham Festival broadcast live on Radio 3 and across the European Broadcasting Union.

The English Northern Philharmonia

The English Northern Philharmonia (The Orchestra of Opera North) has established itself, since its formation in 1978, as one of the country's leading orchestras. In addition to playing for all Opera North's performances in Leeds and on tour, the orchestra enjoys an independent existence as a symphony orchestra, giving concerts throughout the country. The English Northern Philharmonia has appeared with numerous international guest conductors and soloists, as well as with David Lloyd-Jones, its Founder Conductor, Paul Daniel, who was Opera North's Music Director and Principal Conductor of the orchestra from 1990 to 1997, and with its current Principal Conductor, Steven Sloane. The orchestra is an important contributor to all the major concert series in the Yorkshire region and has also made several visits abroad, not only with Opera North, but also independently in its capacity as a symphony orchestra. Apart from its full-scale symphonic concerts, the English Northern Philharmonia also gives several chamber orchestra concerts and accompanies many of the region's choral societies. The orchestra has a strong commitment to educational and community work, and is involved with several schools-based projects both in Leeds and further afield. Its Student Training Scheme, initiated in 1983, which gives full-time music students in Yorkshire the opportunity to play with the orchestra for certain rehearsals, is still the only one of its type in the country. 1993 saw the launch of the orchestra's New Composers Forum, aimed at giving young composers an opportunity to hear their works rehearsed and performed by a professional orchestra. A series of recordings for major record companies has involved a close relationship with Naxos, with highly acclaimed releases that include Walton's two *Symphonies*, and his *Viola, Violin and Cello Concertos* conducted by Paul Daniel, and recordings of works by Bliss, Delius, Vaughan Williams and Constant Lambert conducted by David Lloyd-Jones. In the operatic field Opera North has made several important recordings, including Walton's *Troilus and Cressida* conducted by Richard Hickox, which won the prestigious Gramophone Award for best opera recording.

Paul Daniel

Paul Daniel is widely regarded as one of the most exciting and talented conductors of his generation and is in great demand with both opera companies and orchestras. He appears as a guest conductor with major orchestras throughout the world and became Music Director of English National Opera in September 1997. Before his appointment, he had already worked extensively with the company. Paul Daniel was Music Director of Opera North from 1990 to 1997, where he attracted critical acclaim for his exciting and fresh performances. During his tenure as Principal Conductor of the English Northern Philharmonia, the orchestra of Opera North, he conducted numerous concerts throughout Britain and also took the orchestra to many festivals including Musica in Strasbourg and the Edinburgh Festival. He has made many recordings with the orchestra for major companies and his recording of the Elgar/Payne *Symphony No 3* with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra was one of the best selling classical CDs of 2000. He was Music Director of Opera Factory from 1987 to 1990. In February 1998 Paul Daniel received an Olivier Award for outstanding achievement in opera, and in 1999 he received a Gramophone award for his English music series on the Naxos label. He was awarded the CBE in the 2000 New Year's Honours list.

Belshazzar's Feast

- ① Thus spake Isaiah:
Thy sons that thou shalt beget,
They shall be taken away
And be eunuchs
In the palace of the King of Babylon.
Howl ye, howl ye, therefore:
For the day of the Lord is at hand!

By the waters of Babylon,
There we sat down: yea, we wept
And hanged our harps upon the willows.

For they that wasted us
Required of us mirth;
They that carried us away captive
Required of us a song.
Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a strange land?

- ② If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.
Yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

By the waters of Babylon
There we sat down: yea, we wept.
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed,
Happy shall he be that taketh thy children
And dasheth them against a stone,
For with violence shall that great city
Babylon be thrown down
And shall be found no more at all.

- ③ Babylon was a great city,
Her merchandise was of gold and silver,
Of precious stones, of pearls, of fine linen,
Of purple, silk and scarlet,
All manner vessels of ivory,

All manner vessels of most precious wood,
Of brass, iron and marble,
Cinnamon, odours and ointments,
Of frankincense, wine and oil,
Fine flour, wheat and beasts,
Sheep, horses, chariots, slaves,
And the souls of men.

In Babylon
Belshazzar the King made a great feast,
Made a feast to a thousand of his lords,
And drank wine before the thousand.

Belshazzar, whilst he tasted the wine,
Commanded us to bring the gold and silver vessels:
Yea! the golden vessels,
which his father, Nebuchadnezzar,
Had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem.

He commanded us to bring the golden vessels
Of the temple of the house of God,
That the King, his Princes, his wives,
And his concubines might drink therein.

Then the King commanded us:
Bring ye the cornet, flute, sackbut, psaltery
And all kinds of music: they drank wine again,
Yea, drank from the sacred vessels,

And then spake the King:

- ④ Praise ye the God of Gold,
Praise ye the God of Silver,
Praise ye the God of Iron,
Praise ye the God of Wood,
Praise ye the God of Stone,
Praise ye the God of Brass,
Praise ye the Gods!
- ⑤ Thus in Babylon, the mighty city,
Belshazzar the King made a great feast,

Made a feast to a thousand of his lords
And drank wine before the thousand.

Belshazzar while he tasted the wine
Commanded us to bring the gold and silver vessels
That his Princes, his wives and his concubines
Might rejoice and drink therein.

After they had praise their strange gods,
The idols and the devils,
False gods who can neither see nor hear,
Called they for the timbrel and the pleasant harp

To extol the glory of the King.
Then they pledged the King before the people,
Crying, Thou, O King, art King of Kings:
O King, live for ever. . .

- 6 And in that same hour, as they feasted,
Came forth fingers of a man's hand
And the King saw
The part of the hand that wrote.
And this was the writing that was written:
"MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN"
"Thou art weighed in the balance
and found wanting."
In that night was Belshazzar the King slain
And his Kingdom divided.

- 7 Then sing aloud to God our strength:
Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.
Take a psalm, bring hither the timbrel,
Blow up the trumpet in the new moon,
Blow up the trumpet in Zion
For Babylon the Great is fallen, fallen.
Alleluia!

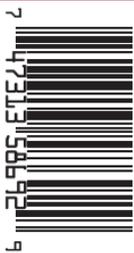
Then sing aloud to God our strength:
Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob,
While the Kings of the Earth lament
And the merchants of the Earth
Weep, wail and rend their raiment.
They cry, Alas, Alas, that great city,
In one hour is her judgement come.

- 8 The trumpeters and pipers are silent,
And the harpers have ceased to harp,
And the light of a candle shall shine no more.
- 9 Then sing aloud to God our strength:
Make a joyful noise to the God of Jacob,
For Babylon the Great is fallen. Alleluia!

*Words selected from biblical sources by
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**DDD**

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Playing Time
48:17© 1998, 2004 & © 2004
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Sung texts included
Made in Canada
www.naxos.com**NAXOS****WALTON: Belshazzar's Feast****8.555869**

Walton's searing oratorio, *Belshazzar's Feast*, written for baritone, chorus and a huge orchestra with an augmented brass section, takes as its subject the scene from the Bible (Book of Daniel) in which, at King Belshazzar's Feast, a hand appears and prophetically writes a doom-laden message on the wall. Often compared on account of its pulsating drive and barbaric splendour with Orff's *Carmina Burana*, *Belshazzar's Feast* is now regarded as the finest British large-scale choral work since Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*.

Friends of
 North**William
WALTON**
(1902-1983)

Belshazzar's Feast	34:13	7	Then sing aloud to God	4:23
1 Thus spake Isaiah	5:13	8	The trumpeters and pipers are silent	1:03
2 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem	5:03	9	Then sing aloud to God	3:36
3 Babylon was a great city	4:28	10	Crown Imperial	6:45
4 Praise ye	5:16	11	Orb and Sceptre	7:20
5 Thus in Babylon	3:14			
6 And in that same hour	1:57			

**Christopher Purves, Baritone • Simon Lindley, Organ
Huddersfield Choral Society • Leeds Philharmonic Chorus
Laudibus • English Northern Philharmonia • Paul Daniel**

Recorded at the Town Hall, Leeds, UK., on the 30th June and 1st July, 2001 (Tracks 1-9)
and on 7th July and 25th October, 1996 (Tracks 10-11) • Producers: Andrew Walton
(K&A Productions Ltd.) (Tracks 1-9) and Chris Craker (Tracks 10-11)

Engineers: Eleanor Thomason & Mike Clements (Tracks 1-9) and David Harries (Tracks 10-11)
Post-production: Andrew Walton and Peter Newble (Tracks 1-9) • Publishers: OUP • MCPS

This recording was made and edited at 24bit resolution

Cover Picture: *Belshazzar's Feast* c.1636-38 by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, (1606-69)
(The National Gallery, London, UK / Bridgeman Art Library)

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