

Da Capo goes home-grown! (... with a dash of Perestroika)
Programme notes

English Dances (Set Two) (1951)

Malcolm Arnold (b.1921), Arr. Nigel Herbert

Allegro Non Troppo; Con Brio; Grazioso; Giubiloso

Arnold wrote his first set of English Dances in 1950, at the request of his publisher who wanted companion-pieces for Dvorák's *Slavonic Dances*. This first set proved so successful that another was immediately requested, and a further four dances were published in 1951, the year of the Festival of Britain. With their tunefulness, fresh harmonies and bracing, out-of-doors orchestration they perfectly captured the optimistic mood of the time.

Like the Dvorák dances, *English Dances* contain no actual folk tunes; Arnold simply took inspiration from the general style of English folk-music. The first dance is a whimsical march with a heroic central section; the second begins as a playful jig in the manner of Holst and ends in high spirits. Next comes a tranquil interlude with a lilting melody, the most obviously 'folksy' dance of the set. The final dance is pure celebration – Arnold unleashes the full band at a gallop and plays all sorts of rhythmic tricks before ending the suite with a jubilant march.

Thames Journey (1991)

Nigel Hess (b.1953)

Hess' most familiar work is in the field of television (including *Hetty Wainthrop Investigates*, *Wycliffe* and *Maigret*), film (including *An Ideal Husband* and *Ladies in Lavender*) and stage, but he has also written works for symphonic wind band.

Thames Journey follows the journey of the Thames, beginning at its origins as a few drops of water in Wiltshire. The journey crosses into Oxfordshire, close to the village of Bampton where morris dancing was invented. At Godston nunnery we hear an ancient plainsong melody, *Domino*, and then into Oxford itself, with its spires and steeple bells. The world Poohsticks Championships are held at Little Wittenham, an event to which trombones and trumpets pay tribute, then on into Berkshire. A boating song as we pass through Henley and *Here is a Health unto His Majesty*, a song popular in the reign of Charles II, in Windsor. We sight Hampton Court and hear Henry VIII's *Greensleeves*, pass Big Ben and then nostalgically remember London Bridge. Finally, we arrive at Greenwich, where we hear the sailors' hymn *Eternal Father, Strong to Save* before our Wiltshire melody proudly sweeps out to meet the ocean.

With such rich and diverse sources of music across several counties and centuries, this has become one of Hess' most popular wind band works.

Pastorale, for Violin, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet and Bassoon (1933)
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Stravinsky's *Pastorale*, a song without words originally written for soprano and piano, was composed in 1907 and is one of a group of early works written under the supervision of Rimsky-Korsakov (the work is even dedicated to Rimsky's daughter, Nadia). However, unlike Stravinsky's other early works the *Pastorale* bears none of Rimsky's compositional fingerprints. Stravinsky re-set the piece several times: for soprano and four wind instruments, for violin and piano, and for violin and four wind instruments. Both violin versions are slightly longer than the earlier soprano versions, but otherwise leave the music unchanged.

A limpid and poised solo line set above a simple yet asymmetrical accompaniment, the *Pastorale* seems much more like a work from Stravinsky's cool objective maturity than his subjective and (relatively) hot-blooded youth.

Suite No.1 in E-flat (1909)

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Chaconne; Intermezzo; March

In 1909, Holst composed the *Suite No.1 in E-flat*, a revolutionary piece in that it was written exclusively for wind band. At that time, concert wind band repertoire consisted of reductions of pieces originally scored for orchestras. Holst wanted to make the concert band a serious concert medium, and this piece was a first step in that direction. He was well qualified for this role as concert band composer; he played trombone and was acquainted with the working of wind instruments.

Holst's style differs from other composers, who generally wrote for the concert band as they would for an orchestra without strings. The piece starts off with the *Chaconne*, a melody of 16 notes that starts in the baritone and makes its way throughout the entire band, and in the middle of the piece the trombone plays the inversion of this progression. Building ever so slowly, the finale of this first movement is marked by a strong fortissimo in all instruments and a sustained chord by the upper winds as the lower brass drops out. The remaining two movements are actually based on a segment of this *Chaconne* theme. The *Intermezzo* is marked vivace and through the vibrant tempo we are shown Holst's mastery in writing for woodwind instruments. The piece ends with a *March* in the form ABA, yet what makes it interesting is the combination of the two melodies in the finale with a sophisticated counterpoint.

**** INTERVAL ****

Procession of the Nobles (Cortège from *Mlada*) (1890)

Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), Arr. Erik W G Leidzen

One of the most unique aspects of this piece is the mood in which it is written – more joyous than melancholy. The opening brass fanfare announces the entry of the nobility in this cortège (funeral procession) from the opera *Mlada* and the woodwinds provide the regal flourishes. Based on a text from Slavic mythology and set on the coast of the Baltic Sea, this opera was the first work of Rimsky-Korsakov's to show the influence of Richard Wagner, who affected so many composers of the time and inspired Rimsky to devote himself almost entirely to operas. Although the opera *Mlada* was a failure, this symphonic offering has been enjoyed by audiences since its first introduction.

The Ringing Isle (1997)

Jonathan Dove (b.1959), Arr. Phillip Littlemore

Handel called Britain the ringing isle because when he went to live there he heard bells ringing everywhere: great bells in church towers and handbells in some of the first private houses he visited. The sound of people 'ringing the changes' is a peculiarly British sound of celebration, and it seemed a good starting point for a piece celebrating British musical life – the piece was commissioned by BT in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Association of British Orchestras.

Within *The Ringing Isle*, Dove incorporates some traditional change-ringing patterns, from *Grandsire Doubles*, *Oxford Treble Bob Minor* and his own version of *Plain Bob Major*. Handel's phrase also conjures up an image of a magical island, and so this is how Dove envisaged it must have been to approach Britain from an ocean voyage.

Salut d'amour, for violin & piano, Op. 12 (1888)

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Written ten years before the *Enigma Variations* that brought him international fame, Elgar was still a little-known, struggling composer when he wrote *Salut d'amour* (Love's greeting). This short piece reflects the Victorian taste for tuneful salon music – preferably with a Frenchified title – and it is easy to dismiss it as an insignificant trifle. However, for the work to establish itself so forcefully in what was a fiercely competitive field says much for its charm and quality. And, as Elgar's first published work, it has a historical value, containing pointers to the skills that Elgar was to develop and display in his later works. Originally for violin and piano, it has been transcribed many times for other instruments, though (having no lyric) not for voice. It is not overtly sentimental, despite its title, and the flowing, song-like line is best served by bowed instruments.

Tahiti Trot (Tea for Two) (1927)

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), Arr. Rodney Bashford

This delightful arrangement of the celebrated dance-tune *Tea for Two*, from the American composer Vincent Youmans' musical comedy *No, No, Nanette*, was originally made in 45 minutes. The conductor Nikolai Malko had challenged Shostakovich to orchestrate this hugely popular number in under an hour. This was not quite the end of the *Tahiti Trot* – Shostakovich later re-used it in the third act of his ballet *The Age of Gold*.

Lincolnshire Posy (1937-8)

Percy Aldridge Grainger (1882-1961)

Lisbon (Sailor's Song)

Horkstow Grange (The Miser and his Man: A local Tragedy)

Rufford Park Poachers (Poaching Song)

The Brisk Young Sailor (who returned to wed his True Love)

Lord Melbourne (War Song)

The Lost Lady Found (Dance Song)

Grainger's absolute masterpiece for wind band is without a doubt *Lincolnshire Posy*, the 'musical wildflowers' from Lincolnshire. In this work, Grainger was able to exploit his ideas on rhythm, harmony and orchestration in the six folk songs collected during his hunt for folk melodies in Lincolnshire in 1905-6.

Although the music is based on existing melodies, Grainger adapted the songs in such a personal way that *Lincolnshire Posy* can't be called a mere selection of arrangements. Grainger explained his intentions: "Each number is intended to be a kind of musical portrait of the singer who sang its underlying melody... a musical portrait of the singer's personality no less than of his habits of song... his regular or irregular wonts of rhythm, his preference for gaunt or ornately arabesqued delivery, his contrasts of legato and staccato, his tendency towards breadth or delicacy of tone". He dedicated the work to "the old folksingers, who sang so sweetly to me".

Grainger had incredible insight for composing for wind band and composed directly into the parts – which were spread widely on the floor – without a score (this full score edition being assembled by Frederick Fennell).