



Thames Youth Orchestra

Simon Ferris, conductor

Tiffin Girls' Choir

Madeleine Holmes, director

Concert

Saturday July 18th 2009
7.30pm

All Saints Kingston



Programme

William Walton (1902-1983) Henry V suite for orchestra, arr. Muir Mathieson

- I. Overture: The Globe Playhouse
- II. Passacaglia: Death of Falstaff
- III. Charge and Battle
- IV. 'Touch her soft lips and part'
- V. Agincourt Song

Walton, was self-effacing to a fault, and would turn his attention with unfailing affability (if somewhat notorious tardiness) to any commission or collaboration. But he had, notwithstanding his very public profile from the 1920s on, a musical personality of uncompromising distinctiveness. Laurence Olivier said of him "his paleness and coldness made the passionate blaze in all his music a thing of wonder and amazement."

So he might have been expected to approach the task of scoring Olivier's 1944 film version of Shakespeare's Henry V with a touch of weary cynicism. Here was the great actor/director's paean to the resoluteness of England, shot at a time when the turning of the war in the Allies' favour made its defiance look something like triumphalism. And yet the result, with its intelligent handling of its own theatricality, and in its bristling stylized sumptuousness (it was filmed with Great Britain's only Technicolor camera), managed to make of itself something much better than mere propaganda, even if it is still very much of its particular historical moment.

It was not Walton's first collaboration with Olivier, nor by any means his first dalliance with film. But while he wrote a good deal of film music, he was unwilling to accord it – at least to begin with – any serious recognition as *artwork*. In tracing and underwriting the mood and action of a movie, there was a sense in which a composer lost track of form, he believed, and gave up control of structure. Writing in March 1942, around the time he was working on the music for the film *The First of the Few* which narrated R.J. Mitchell's struggle to develop the Spitfire fighter, Walton wrote "the music is entirely occasional and is of no use other than what it is meant for ... the music should never be heard without the film."

Turning film music into a suite, therefore, as with Henry V, or into a prelude and fugue, as with the music to *The First of the Few*, was to return it to known concert forms, and to accord it, in turn, a sort of formal regularity. The suite in this case was put together with Walton's acquiescence and approval by Muir Mathieson in 1963, (although Walton had already conducted a slightly smaller suite at the end of

war which had been arranged by Sir Malcolm Sergeant). It is constructed in five movements, as follows:

Overture: The Globe Playhouse – In the film, the entire first act of the play takes place on stage in the Globe theatre, and Walton's Elizabethan lively pastiche is based on the fanfares and drum rolls of the theatre band.

Passacaglia: Death of Falstaff – The passacaglia is based on the Elizabethan drinking song, *Watkins's Ale*, which is used in the film in its livelier form to designate the Boar's Head, the Inn at which Sir John Falstaff spent much of his time and at which he is now dying.

Charge and Battle – Walton might have blushed had he met Prokofiev, so much does it owe to *Alexander Nevsky*. As with the Eisenstein (a silent film, of course) the music for much of the charge stood in for the sound of actual battle, as though the formalized set piece battles of the early 15th century were chiefly an aesthetic experience. Disarmingly, the cor anglais descants on the aftermath of battle: the tune is Bailerio, set by Canteloube in his songs of the Auvergne – Walton had not bothered to seek permission for its use, and an aggrieved Canteloube was awarded damages after the premiere. Bailerio becomes the lietmotif for Catherine, the daughter of the King of France, whom Henry will court and marry – as though what must emerge from this slaughter is a new form of civic harmony.

'Touch her soft lips and part' – is a wistful minuet, emerging in the film at the moment where Pistol, Bardolph and Nim are taking their leave of Mistress Quickly, now Pistol's wife, and departing for the war – a familiar enough sight in the 1940s, and one on which the film was pleased to dwell.

Agincourt Song – Walton's chorale treatment of the traditional Agincourt Song marks the culmination of Henry's progress through France, with his marriage and coronation.

Walton, notoriously slow at composition, struggled with the music for Henry V – "How does one distinguish between a cross bow and a long bow, musically speaking?" he asked, in mock-despair – but under that habitual self-deprecation there perhaps lurked a good deal of pride – after the first private screening he said to Olivier "I'm very glad you showed it to me, because I must tell you I did think it was terribly dull without the music."

Interval (20 minutes)

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) The Planets, op.34

The Planets, like *Henry V*, was a war work, but it was a different war and Holst, unlike Walton, was only obliquely of the establishment; and so while the *Henry V*

suite might at a push be derived from the material conditions of its production, *The Planets* cuts across the war rather than through it.

What inspired the piece, in fact, was the dilettantish Edwardian mysticism which led to the startling revival of, among other things, astrology. Holst was introduced to the 'discipline' by the writer Clifford Bax, himself an astronomer, whilst on holiday with Clifford and his brother Arnold Bax, and Balfour Gardiner, in Spain in 1913. Soon afterwards, Holst wrote to a friend, "...recently the character of each planet suggested lots to me, and I have been studying astrology fairly closely."

While the astrology, as such, was met by Holst's intelligent and curious skepticism (although he would occasionally cast horoscopes for his friends, calling it his pet vice), it clearly touched on a wider ranging intellectual project which had led him, for example, to study Sanskrit and set hymns of the *Bagavad Gita*. He said later, in connection with his astrological dabbling, "I only study things that suggest music to me", as though the composition of music, rather than the practice of music-making per se (Holst was a trombonist), were in itself a quasi-mystical experience.

It would of course be an-overdetermination to read in the progression of the movements a conscious philosophical programme: Holst described the work as a series of mood pictures, and one of the determining contexts of the work's sound-world is the modernism of Ravel and Stravinsky, rather than the programmatic gravitas of, say, Richard Strauss. However, it is worth noting that both Mars and Neptune are in 5/4, a sort of rhythmic rhyming of unthinking carnal brutality with unthinking mystical revelation, and that whether this represents a duality or a dialectic, much of the music is informed by similar binary oppositions.

The work was scored for such a large orchestra – triple woodwind (including such exotics as the bass oboe and bass flute, extensive brass (including euphonium), celesta, organ, extensive percussion – that Holst despaired of ever having it performed; in the end, on the eve of his departure for Salonika in 1917, his friend the impresario Balfour Gardiner laid on for him as a present the Queen's Hall and Queen's Hall orchestra, and Adrian Boult conducted the private premiere.

The suite is arranged geocentrically, as follows:

Mars, the Bringer of War. Mars was the first movement to be completed on the eve of war in August 1914, and its snarling snare drum tattoos and trumpet fanfares, the *col legno* iteration and the brutal directness of its architecture may very have been intended to evoke a new kind of warfare. On that holiday in Spain, Holst had spoken with trepidation of Zeppelins and other machines of modern destruction. The motivic cells of which it is built up – the sliding chromatic first theme, and the second theme on tubas culminating in a fanfare of trumpets – do not of themselves have any particular harmonic goal or purposiveness, but are rather borne along on the relentless crescendo.

Venus, the Bringer of Peace. A Renaissance astronomer would naturally have discoursed on Venus-humanitatis – the patron deity of intellectual concord (as opposed, perhaps, to the intellectual vigour of Mercury); *Peace*, in other words, here extends much further than the absence of war – it suggests a harmony of means and ends, of existence and life. And musically, in terms of its texture, harmonic writing and rhythmic subtlety, it is not simple, as though, in contrast to the grinding simplicity of Mars, the maintenance of peaceful concord is a process of complex balancing.

Mercury, the Winged Messenger. Holst described this movement as an analogue to the working of the human mind. It operates, musically, around two keys, present simultaneously in almost every bar (the keys are Bb and E, which having no notes of their triad in common, are particularly remote), and two rhythmic organizations of its six in a bar, one conceived as a triple time and the other as duple time. The movement is a brief flickering dialectic of mental acuity.

Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity. Jupiter is a sort of Cockaigne of the spirit, having the bounce and savour of Edwardian music hall (legend has it that during rehearsals for the first performance at the Queen's Hall women washing the floors outside got up an impromptu dance when the band played Jupiter). It is as though, in the sudden rush of thematic material – up to six themes in the first three minutes of music – the suite were passing momentarily and giddily through Holst's own particular bit of the space-time continuum – London c.1915. And then, at the centre both of the movement and of the suite, is the only unequivocally English-sounding passage in the work: an Anglican moment of formalized celebration and spiritual forthrightness – for all his quirky mysticism we should not forget that Holst was an inheritor of the English choral tradition.

Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age. This movement, for all the tolling flute and harp of its opening, and the inescapable melancholy of its opening theme on double basses which is rhythmically and harmonically detached, as it were, from its accompaniment, is, with Uranus, the only movement to set off and arrive somewhere; where it arrives, via a weary but gathering march which culminates in a violent tolling of bells, is a tonal and textural space set apart – a sort of eastern musical stasis where harps now keep the hours, and the tolling of bells is more like a Buddhist monastery than a Viking invasion – into which, at its conclusion, the double basses are quietly reintegrated. This was Holst's favourite movement.

Uranus, the Magician. Uranus has the bluster of a magician, not a mystic, and the arcane is rooted firmly in the urbane. However, for all its gestures of tutting bassoons, bristling xylophone and harrumphing brass, the movement finally breaks into unexpected musical spaces as though, like some renaissance alchemist, all his fussing with alembics and concoctions really had enabled some moment of Faustian insight.

Neptune, the Mystic. The last movement, like the first, is in 5/4, but not the least of its contrasts with Mars is the seeming disappearance of the bar line; while the work is not about the solar system, the final bars of Neptune have nevertheless dictated how we now think musically of the planets and the recesses of deep space. Whether the rhythmic coupling with Mars is completing some circle of being, or being set up as a dialectic, is not resolved. The chorus of wordless female voices completes the piece with a cinematographic fade out.

programme notes © John Ferris, 2008

*This evening's performance is dedicated to the memory of
Christine Stott (1939-2008), who loved this music.*

Simon Ferris, conductor

Simon Ferris read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. As an undergraduate he pursued additional instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and, after graduation, received composition tuition and encouragement from Geoffrey Bush.

A skilled and experienced jazz musician, Simon's wide-ranging professional career now embraces an array of genres and disciplines, encompassing performing, composing, arranging, writing, conducting and teaching.

Simon is currently Composer in Residence at Tiffin School, and Musician in Residence at The Tiffin Girls' School

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The purpose of the Friends' Association is to provide financial support to the orchestra to help offset the significant expenses of running a full-scale symphonic ensemble. These costs include music, venue and instrument hire, staffing, performing rights, publicity, transport, maintaining a web presence, catering – the list goes on.

The cost of membership of the friends' scheme is £15 per annum for an individual subscription, £25 for family membership and £40 for corporate members. The benefits are as follows:

- Reduced ticket prices for concerts and events
- Members' names listed in concert programmes
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TYO STAFF

Musical Director – Simon Ferris
Executive Director – Rebecca Lacey
Violins Coach – Adrian Charlesworth
Cellos Coach – Sarah Hedley-Miller
Lower Strings Coach – Pippa Hyde
Brass Coach – Ian Stott
Wind Coach – Andrew Watson
Percussion Coach – Ben Porter
Librarian – Mayuko Tanno
Administrator – Tillie Dilworth
Treasurer – Sarah Bruce
Friends Coordinator – Miranda Fagandini

Tiffin Girls' Choir Madeleine Holmes, director

Chorus I
Isabelle Bush
Lila Chrisp
Annabel Collett
Jenny Dawson
Sophie Dodd
Nicola Ellis
Bridget Langford
Keerthana Mahadevan
Isabel Palmer
Lola Robey-Levine
Beckie Sturge

Chorus II
Cleo Dobson
Lucy Eve
Izzy Eyres
Tash Goodman
Maddie Gunn
Marina Hobday
Emily Kelstead
Ellie Raynham
Steffi Schofield

THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

Max Liefkes, leader

First Violins

Max Liefkes*
Eunyoung Kim
James Walsh
Bola Kim
Eli Lee
Celia Rogers
Anna Selig
Celia Rogers
Aran Garrod
Declan Seachoy

Second Violins

Pradeep Kannan*
Aashraya Shankar
Olivia Johnson
Imogen Dodds
Rosie Parker
Sian Davies
Jessica Plummer
Toby Piachaud
Sung-Hyo Lee
Adisha Kapila
Alex Ewan

Violas

Tillie Dilworth*
Eleanor Figueiredo
Grace Moon
Ed Tan

Cellos

Jonathan Bruce*
Eunyoung Lee
Miles Dilworth
Emily Hearne
Fred Mikardo-Greaves
Arran Mornin
Tom Davies
Sarah Ebsworth
Hannah Evans

Bass

Marianne Schofield*
Louis Kirkman
James Andrewes

Flutes

Mayuko Tanno*
Chris James
Lauren Lovick
Sung Kim
Katy Ovens (piccolo)

Oboes

Catherine Hancock*
Diya Kapila
Christopher Lutton

Bass Oboe

Jan Knight

Cor Anglais

Giacomo Pozzuto

Clarinets

Georgina Feary*
Tom Nichols
Charles Kimber
Ben Ingledew

Bassoons

Isabel White*
Toby Hasler-Winter
Leah Mirsky
Alison White
Nick Fletcher

*principal

Horns

Catie Igoe*
Hugh Sisley
Alexei Watkins
Clara Hardingham
Chris Born
Emma Walker
David Liu

Trumpets

Imogen Hancock*
Bryony Watson
Matthew Parker
Max Fagandini
Robert Hawkins

Trombones

Edmund Jillings
Hattie Martin
Matilda Ashe-Belton
Peter De Beurk

Tenor Tuba

Brian LeTissier

Tuba

Olivia Archibald
Katherine Chevis

Timpani

Will Lewis-Smith

Percussion

Rupert Price
Patrick Milne
Hugo Fagandini

Celeste

Patrick Milne

Harp

Danielle Megranahan
Charlotte Ainsworth

Organ

Simon Toyne

