



Thames Youth Orchestra

Simon Ferris, conductor

Amelia Brown, soprano

Concert

Saturday January 15th 2011

7.30pm

All Saints Kingston



Programme

Edward Elgar (1857-1934), *Cockaigne (In London Town)* Op. 40

The *Cockaigne Overture* followed rapidly on Elgar's first great success as a composer – the *Enigma Variations* of 1899 – and his first great (temporary) failure, the premiere of the *Dream of Gerontius* in Birmingham in 1900.

Elgar was highly sensitised both to class – his father, although a good musician, was nevertheless a tradesman – and to his position in the musical establishment, and the critical rejection of *Gerontius* left him reeling. At around this time he had been working on drafts of a symphony, but - perhaps partly in response to his momentary insecurity and depression - the assembled material fell apart, and was translated into *Cockaigne* and the first two *Pomp and Circumstance* marches.

Cockaigne, as painstakingly glossed by Elgar in the score, is both an imagined land of plenty and the vibrant (Cockney) world of London street life. And while the first ideas for the overture came to him in London's Guildhall ('looking at the memorials of the city's great past & knowing well the history of its unending charity, I seemed to hear far away in the dim roof a theme, an echo of some noble melody') the work was completed at home in Malvern. When the overture was finished on 24th March 1901 he added a subscription to the score which he had lifted from Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and which expressed his ironic sense of exile both from the Capital of the World and from the musical establishment: 'Meteless and moneless on Malvern hills'.

It is telling, perhaps, that the noble theme which came to him in the Guildhall (and which for the first time in Elgar's oeuvre carries that favourite marking of his, *nobilmente*) is ensconced in a demotically flavoured pastiche of London street life. Three themes are presented in quick succession: an unhurried rhythmic jaunt and the broadly lyrical *nobilmente*, followed by a *sostenuto* evocation of two lovers in a park; the *nobilmente* returns, now ironically (and almost unrecognizably) reworked to suggest the irrepressible cheeriness of a whistling errand boy, this leading in turn to the crashing entry of a marching band (and the distant echoes of its Salvation Army counterpart, thinly scored and replete with tambourine). A central section has the lovers retreat from all the noise into the calm of a church interior, with the final pages drawing all of this material together, now under the aegis of a last great statement of the *nobilmente* theme, for which Elgar, as he does in the *Enigma Variations*, summons the organ to lend its voice to the articulated pomp and ceremony.

Like the overture to *Die Meistersinger* (to which both Tovey and George Bernard Shaw compared it, partly for its transformational handling of themes), *Cockaigne* is an attempt to see city life as an organic and structured whole, and if it is not exactly a *saturnalia*, London life is certainly one where imagined greatness (as emblematised for Elgar by the coats of arms in the Guildhall – the trading heart of London, analogue to Wagner’s guilds) is distilled from an ordinary workaday vitality. Elgar described the work as straightforwardly ‘cheerful and Londony – stout and steaky’ but to him, out there in the Malvern hills at the age of 44, on the far edge of everything he aspired to, it is perhaps less prosaically a Langland dream of a city – and a form of life – that is itself (*far away in the dim roof*) dreaming greatness.

Thomas Adès (b. 1971) *...but all shall be well* Op.10 for orchestra (1993)

Raymond Adès (1915-1993), the dedicatee of ...but all shall be well was the composer’s grandfather. He lived at Oxshott for fifty years and was for many years a magistrate at Walton-on-Thames.

...but all shall be well was composed for the 150th anniversary of the Cambridge Music Society and was premiered by the society orchestra conducted by Stephen Cleobury in Ely Cathedral in 1994. It was Adès’s first piece for full, not to say large, orchestra (it is scored for triple woodwind, six horns, and a very full percussion complement).

The title is a quotation from the fourteenth century mystic Julian of Norwich, filtered through T.S. Eliot’s *Little Gidding*, the last of the *Four Quartets*: ‘Sin is Behovely, but/All shall be well, and/All manner of things shall be well’. That the composer should quote a modernist poet quoting a fourteenth century mystic is a typical constructive strategy: Adès’s music is highly allusive (there are references in this short piece to Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Liszt’s *Consolations*); it is music which derives its form from a sort of cultural trigonometry, a knowledge of precisely where and how it is situated.

Adès has referred to the piece as a consolation. Consolation is at once an inarticulately emotional or cathartic event and a philosophical and discursive practice; we turn to music not only for solace, in other words, but also for clarity, and if the two are not always naturally co-existent, the tension between them is generative rather than obstructive.

What is generated, then, by this large orchestra in a short span of time (roughly 10 minutes) is a complex and multiplanar object predicated on one simple idea – a rising and falling theme for clarinet and then strings. This theme slouches out from a rhythmically centreless introductory passage of tintinnabulation alternating with proleptic fragments (both motivic and textural) of the theme itself; it lies at the root not just of sequential and vertical cells of

music, but of music that is temporally displaced; if time signatures in music are analogues to ticking clocks, then what we have here is a multi-temporal construct, a sort of Bergsonian cathedral of sound, where we can hear, simultaneously insofar as that is possible, different rates of motion, ideas in the music which seem to have a pace and purpose of their own.

The rising and falling motif is not morphologically immune to the complex interactions taking place around it; it takes on a keening quality, starts to swoop in *portamenti* as if getting into the swing, trying out attitudes; the cells or passages of music (which surround and intersperse this central thematic idea like an encroaching jungle of strange indifferent percussive pops, whirrs and rattles, skittering and slithering strings, bits of brass chorale) are subtly cross-linked in *sotto voce* statement and response, and what is ultimately built up is the sense of a complex musical topology which is rational without being either discursive or rhetorical. The work culminates in a transcendent final chord with a high major third hovering above it, as the stepwise incantatory motif is finally stilled.

Interval (20 minutes)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958) Symphony No. 3 ‘Pastoral’

- I. Molto moderato
- II. Lento moderato
- III. Moderato pesante
- IV. Lento

By his own belated admission (in a letter to his second wife, Ursula, in 1939) Vaughan Williams wrote *A Pastoral Symphony* in response to his experience in the Great War. He had enlisted in 1914 at the age of 41 as a private in the Royal Army Medical Corps and served most of the conflict as a wagon orderly in France and on the Salonika front (being transferred to the Artillery on his return to France late in the war).

The symphony that emerged from the horror and loss of those years is more than an elegiac outpouring (although it is also, clearly, that): it is a work of formal grieving - understood as an act of memory that makes the experience and nature of loss intelligible – realised in the pastoral idiom.

It is the act of remembering that makes sense of that link (between grieving and pastoral). In part, of course, the remembering relates to the remembrance of the dead; but it also dwells

upon (and is largely generated from) the experience of remembering itself in the midst of war: the way in which certain experiences could become metonyms for a life that stood outside the bloodshed and the bombing, and which made it, if not bearable, then not all-encompassing.

Some of those remembered experiences are translated into the detailed fabric of the symphony - the memory, for instance, of a bugler practising the Last Post that is reinvented as the natural trumpet solo of the second movement; or the memory of a distant singing farm girl that becomes the wordless soprano solo of the last movement.

Other remembered experiences remain more generalised: for example the memory, as expressed years later to his wife Ursula of '[going] up night after night with the ambulance wagon at Écoivres ... up a steep hill and there was a wonderful Corot-like landscape in the sunset'. It is as though the middle-aged Vaughan Williams in the midst of war was able to fashion a psychological lightning rod from an aesthetic construct (in this case, the work of Corot). In the same way, years later, the pastoral idiom is an aesthetic that structures the emotional response, renders it both intelligible and available.

The pastoral idiom of course necessarily excludes certain modes of feeling - its greatest tensions tend to be elegiac rather than, say, tragic, or violent, and are subsumed, by definition as it were, within a natural economy (as is Beethoven's storm, for instance). Similarly, pastoral is not a rhetorical dynamic; the usual expectations of a symphony - that it structure an argument of musical and in particular harmonic contrasts - are treated as secondary.

Not that there is no tension in the symphony, or that it is not built on contrasts: that, for instance, between tonal and modal harmonics and melodic implications, which is characteristic of Vaughan Williams's folk-derived idioms in general. The opening of the first movement, for instance, generates tension between apparently simple modal lines: the implications of the step-wise oscillation of flutes and bassoons leads to a harmonic ambiguity, if not outright bitonality - an ambiguity echoed, moreover, in the rhythmic hesitancy which emerges from the apparently simple juxtaposition of a steady (but charged) quaver movement and dotted four note melodic fragment (on double basses and harp); so that solo violin makes its entry at a deeply unstable moment.

Forward impetus, in both the first movement and the symphony as a whole, is in fact rarely untrammelled, even if in Vaughan Williams's judgement "the mood of this symphony is almost entirely quiet and contemplative". The themes of the first movement are in essence repetitive fragments or scraps of ideas which return relentlessly to their own starting points, sherds of folk-like themes like the ghost voices of the shires. There is no rest, as such, only a greater or lesser urgency, and no little menace.

The natural trumpet solo lodged in the centre of the second movement is a memory of a bugler practising the Last Post, itself the antonym of fanfare and martial zeal. It is nested in themes derived from the quaver movement of the opening to the symphony, as though this act of explicit and meditative memorialisation had managed to dislodge a specific memory.

Vaughan Williams called the third movement a great slow dance. If so it is a sort of stomping Breughel peasant's dance reminiscent of Mahler's Ländler scherzos, laced with robust fanfare and chorale. An impish fugal scurrying trio concludes this essay in tragic joviality.

The wordless soprano of the finale emerges in the wake of an ominous drum roll, and it is as though that lone and centred, modally-inflected voice were the source of all that preceded it; now it seems, for the first time, the music is sure of its direction. The soprano line is followed by a broad theme that for the first time in the symphony flows rather than wheels. The tensions when they emerge are now explicit and are resolved: there is a sense of formal emotional closure, and with the soprano, when she returns underneath sustained high violins at the end of the movement, we approach the opposite of ambiguity - a moment of transcendent certainty, as though the whole symphony had collapsed to a single dimensionless point.

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Thames Youth Orchestra

Anna Selig, leader

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Anna Selig*
James Walsh
Adisha Kapila
Olivia Johnson
Sian Davis
David Kola
Sung-Hyo Lee

Second Violins

Rosie Parker*
Hermione Kellow
Toby Piachaud
Steffi Schofield
Kath Roberts
William Brunt
Nina Lim
Young-Joo Kim
Susan Liu

Violas

Grace Moon*
Tom Pollard
Heppy Longworth

Cellos

Eunyoung Lee*
Miles Dilworth
Amy Hur
Sarah Ebsworth

Bass

Marianne Schofield
James Kenny
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Flutes

Louis Tam*
Minyoung Seo
Ellie Barlow
Hannah Paul-Bhuvanenthiran
Beckie Sturge

Oboes

Catherine Hancock*
Diya Kapila (+cor)
Jesus Duque
Mark Mitchinson

Clarinets

Tom Nichols
Ellie Pryde
Clare McEvoy
Peter Lidbetter

Bassoons

Josh Stevens

Organ/Celeste

Simon Toyne

Harp

Emma Spandrzyk

*principal

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Alexei Watkins*
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