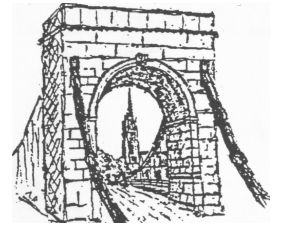




MARLOW U3A MUSIC APPRECIATION GROUP

15th NEWSLETTER – January 2010

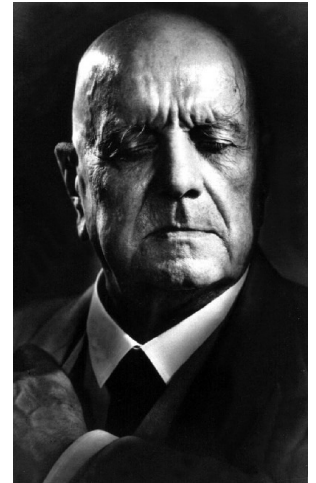


A very happy new year to you all! We hope that you like our new banner. The sketch of Marlow bridge and church is by Andrew Doroszkowski. It is used on the medals and certificates of the Marlow Music Festival.

Our December session, the last in the “Noughties”, suffered from some technical and memory issues. Nevertheless, we hope that the resulting mix of music and humour was interesting and entertaining. Both Keith and Brian would like to thank all those members who contributed to our “liquid” Xmas presents, they were very much appreciated – also Sylvia was most grateful for the lovely bouquet of flowers.

Jean Sibelius’s Violin Concerto

Sibelius was originally influenced by Tchaikovsky and Russian composers, but after Finland gained sovereignty his music became more nationalistic and very much a style of his own. He composed many tone poems including *Karelia Suite*, which established his reputation in 1893, *En Saga*, *Tapiola*, *Swan of Tuonela* and *Finlandia* - a second national anthem. He was among the foremost symphonists of the 20th century, along with Vaughan Williams, Mahler, Shostakovich et al.



His other major work was the *Violin Concerto in D minor*, which Jay introduced. It was first performed in 1903 in Helsinki, but this performance was a disaster so it was withdrawn. It then underwent extensive revision before being premiered with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Richard Strauss in 1905. This was also one of the Sibelius works taken up by Henry Wood at the Proms (1907). We heard the first and second movements, and the start of the third movement, which the British composer and music analyst Donald Tovey referred to as “a polonaise for polar bears”! Many thanks to Jay, and we look forward to her session on the 5th Symphony and *Finlandia* in 2010.

Christmas Music and Humour

Peter’s contribution was *Gaudete* (“Rejoice”), a sacred 16th century Christmas carol. The song was published in the *Piae Cantiones*, a collection of Finnish/Swedish sacred songs published in 1582. The tune comes from older liturgical books. The song, with Latin text, has been taken up by more modern groups such as Steeleye Span and the Mediæval Bæbes! We heard a fine version by the King’s Singers, with brass accompaniment.

Keith then played the choral/orchestral version of *The Snow* – music by Edward Elgar to words by his wife Caroline Alice Elgar. Keith played this at our session last December, but received requests for a repeat hearing this year. It was a very appropriate choice, not only for the beauty of the music but also given the prevailing weather situation!

The final item before the interval was *While Shepherds Watched* in the setting by John Foster (1762-1822) of South Yorkshire. This setting is known as “Old Foster”, with a full 19th century classical orchestral accompaniment. Roy wondered whether it was the same John Foster who formed the original Black Dyke Mills Band – right area, right period...

After the interval Roy gave us a hilarious account of a Yorkshireman’s first visit to a classical concert, which happened to be *The Messiah*. Most of us are familiar with the words and music of this great oratorio, but old Bill Jones from Golcar, a little village in the West Riding, had never been to a performance. He tried to persuade a friend to go with him to the Huddersfield Town Hall to hear the famous choral society, but his friend refused.

“Nay! He said `that sort o` music`s nowt in my line. I like a good comic song or a lively jig, but I reckon nowt to this sacred stuff as they call it. It`s beyond me. An` another thing, there`ll be none of our sort there. It`ll be mostly religious folk and swells done up in boiled shirts and wimmen wi` nowt much on. Nay, you go by theesen and then you can tell me all about it sometime”

So ... Bill went by himself and the next time the old pals met, the following conversation took place.

“Well , cum on.... how did you get on at Messiah?”

“Eee, well” said Bill, “it were fair champion. I wouldn`ta missed it for all to the tea in China. When a got there the Town Hall were crowded, it was choc full o` folk and I had a job to get a seat, but no wonder – it was all them singers – they took up half the gallery. There was a chap larking about on the organ, he weren`t playing nowt in particular, just running `is fingers up and down as if he were practising. Well, after a bit a lot`o chaps came in carrying fiddles, then they brought in the Messiah. Well, that`s what I took it to be. It were the biggest instrument on the platform and it were covered in a big green bag. Anyroad, they took the bag off it and then a bloke rubbed its belly with a stick and you should have heard it groan. It were summat like a dying cow.

“I were just thinking `o going when a little chap came on, all dolled up in white waistceet an wi` a flower in his buttonhole and everything went quiet. You could have heard a pin drop. He had a stick in his hand and he started waving it abaat and all the singers stared at him... I reckon they were wondering what was the matter with him.

“Then they started to sing and they hadn`t been going long before they were fighting like cats. I reckon he shoulda walloped one or two of `em with his stick. First one side said they were the t`king o` glory then t`other side said they were, and they went at it hammer and tongs, but it fizzled out, so I`ve no idea which side won.

“Then there was a bit `o bother abaaat some sheep that was lost. I don`t know who they belonged to but one lot `o singers must have been very fond o` mutton, `cos they kept on singing “All we like sheep”. I couldn`t help saying to a bloke next to me that sheep`s all right in moderation, but I like a bit o` beef me`self, and he looked daggers at me and said “Shh” so I shushed.

“A lot o wimmen stood up after that and all of them looked as if they were...well...gettin` on a bit. Some of `em must have been 64 if they were a day. They sang “Unto us a child is born”, and the chaps sang back “Wonderful”, and I thought, “Wonderful? it’s a bloomin` miracle!” After that they sobered down a bit and sang about a lass called Joyce Greatley. I’ve never heard of her me`sen, but the chaps had, `cos they looked mighty pleased abaat it.

Then some bloke got up and said he was the king`o kings, another one said he was and then, blow me, they all started arguing abaat it. I was gettin` a bit fed up when everybody stood up to see what was the matter and they suddenly shouted ”Hallelujah... it’s going to rain for ever and ever”. Well, at that I jumped up and made straight for the door. I`d had me money`s worth, and besides I was thinkin` that if it was going to rain for ever and ever, I`d better get home before the flood came.

“It was a real good do though, you shoulda` come, but oh, I do hope they find them sheep!”



Brian and Roy (who as you may remember did a great session on brass bands) did a quick comedy act with a few xmas cracker type jokes. Brian then played two carols in arrangements by the Argentinian composer/conductor Waldo De Los Rios (1934-1977).

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) was an English composer whose early musical influences included Parry, Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Gurney. He became a masterly and sensitive setter of poetry. He is also well known for his fine Clarinet Concerto. His works



are usually lyrical and subtly understated. Mike introduced Finzi’s *Magnificat Op.36*, which was written in 1952 for the choir of Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. It was intended for a Christmas Vespers service, rather than for standard liturgical use, concluding with an Amen not a Gloria, and the composer planned an orchestral version from the onset. It is typical of Finzi’s lyrical approach with a great deal of contrapuntal writing. There is also great drama in the work, with the scattering of the proud, and the shewing of strength being particularly forceful. The solo parts are generally brief but telling, and there is a section for semi-chorus.

Sir Arthur Bliss: Things to Come

Ten years ago, RTHK Radio 4 (Hong Kong’s equivalent of BBC Radio 3) asked listeners to suggest music for the end of the decade/millennium. Keith wrote in and suggested the *March and Epilogue from Things to Come* by Sir Arthur Bliss. Not only did they play these in their special programme, but they also used the closing bars of the *Epilogue* in a trailer for some future programmes. As this was the last MAG session of the decade (and the Grimethorpe Band failed to appear), we ended the session with these two pieces.



Things to Come (1936) was a British science fiction film produced by Alexander Korda and directed by William Cameron Menzies, with screenplay by H.G.Wells. After decades of war and pestilence, the last surviving band of engineers and mechanics formed an organisation known as "Wings Over the World". They built a civilisation that renounced war and outlawed independent nation-states.

The film had a mixed reception, but the music was a sensation. A suite (1935) was a brilliant success at the Proms even before the release of the film and the music has been a standard of

the orchestral repertoire ever since. It is considered by many to be one of the greatest film scores ever written, and possibly the finest of all British film scores.

The full score comprises 11 movements, the most famous of which is the *March*. This generated some discussion about tempo (see Newsletter 12, page 2, for a general discussion of this topic). Like the preceding *Prologue*, the *March* has an ominous feel. Brian noted the slower-than-usual tempo of the recording (conducted by Bernard Herrmann) that we heard. This gives the music added menace.

The *Epilogue* is based on a simple *maestoso* melody: dignified, sad and reflective in the central section, but gaining in strength and confidence in the brave new future towards the end. Some versions of this are played too quickly. Bernard Herrmann's reading has the right degree of gravitas, grandeur and "thrilling valedictory emotionalism in every chord".

Postscript on Guenever

During our November session, Keith noted that Hubert Parry had suffered a major setback in the mid-1880s when he failed to secure even a single performance of his opera *Guenever*. Undoubtedly the libretto (by Una Taylor) was a major reason for the rejection. Bad timing (too similar to other works that were about to be presented) was also given as an excuse. John asked whether it had been performed since, and the answer was no. It would now be virtually impossible because parts of the score have been lost. We speculated that excerpts may emerge, and this has now happened with the release of a CD by Dutton Epoch containing *Guenever's Soliloquy from Act 1, Scene 4*, along with works by Elgar, Ireland and Gritton.

CAN ANYONE HELP?

Brian has been asked by one of our members if, as part of his session on the clarinet, he can try and play two pieces – 1) "Tiger Rag" played by the clarinetist who supported Louis Armstrong on his European Tour and 2) "The Martinique" by Cy Laurie. He cannot find either of these pieces. **Can Anyone Help!!** Please phone Brian, if you can.

Future Sessions

Date	Provisional Programme
21 Jan 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♪ Max Bruch (Keith). We'll hear an excerpt from Bruch's <i>Violin Concerto</i> as well as some of the background to this famous work. Keith will also introduce us to Bruch's rarely performed <i>Concerto for Two Pianos</i> and his <i>Third Symphony</i>, as well as to two pairs of piano playing sisters. ♪ The development of the Clarinet from Baroque to Modern Music, including its use in large and small Jazz bands (Brian).
18 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♪ Schubert (Wendy): Songs, chamber works and orchestral music. ♪ Russian Nationalism and "The Mighty Five" - from Glinka to Rimsky-Korsakov (Brian)
18 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♪ A Brief History of the Classical Guitar (Mike) ♪ Sir Arnold Bax (Keith/Brian). His music was influenced by landscape, Celtic and Irish legends, and Russian music. His early successes included tone poems such as <i>Tintagel</i> and <i>The Garden of Fand</i>. He was one of the most important symphonists of the 20th century, producing 7 symphonies in the 1920s and 1930s. This session will include <i>London Pageant</i>, <i>Tintagel</i> and excerpts from the symphonies.

Please note the above dates in your diary. We look forward to seeing you at (or soon after) 9.45am on 21 January.

Concerts

Local concerts in the next few weeks include:

- ♪ Amersham Concerts – Corelli, Vivaldi, Besozzi, Rossini. 8pm on 15 January at St.Mary's Parish Church, Amersham.
- ♪ Sarah Williamson (clarinet)/Danny Driver (piano) – Verdi, Rachmaninoff, Poulenc, Messager, Weber, 7.45pm on 16 January, Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road.
- ♪ Marlow Community Choir: Handel Coronation Anthems and Vivaldi Gloria. 7.30 on 30 January at All Saints Church, Boyn Hill, Maidenhead
- ♪ Amersham Concert Club (clarinet and piano) – Finzi, Saint-Saens, Weber, 8pm on 6 February at Dr Challoner's High School, Little Chalfont.
- ♪ Amersham Festival Lascelles Memorial Concert – Bach, Handel, 8pm on 12 February at St.Mary's Church, Old Amersham.
- ♪ Philharmonia Orchestra – Tchaikovsky, Bruch, Khachaturian, Dvorak and Bizet. 3pm on 14 February at the Royal Festival Hall.
- ♪ Marina Nadiradze (piano) – Scarlatti, Haydn, Ravel, Chopin, 7.45pm on 20 February, Beaconsfield High School, Wattleton Road.
- ♪ City of London Sinfonia/Douglas Boyd (conductor)/Elizabeth Watts (soprano) – Wagner, Berlioz, Mahler, 7.30pm on 14 March, Parish Church, High Wycombe.

Happy listening!

Brian (484099, brian.humphrey2@ntlworld.com) and Keith (891507, keithrachel@hotmail.com)

P.S. Don't forget that you can view what we have done at previous sessions at our web site: <http://www.marlowu3a.org.uk/id12.html>