

Marlow U3A Music Appreciation Group,
March 2010

Sir Arnold Bax



(1883-1953)

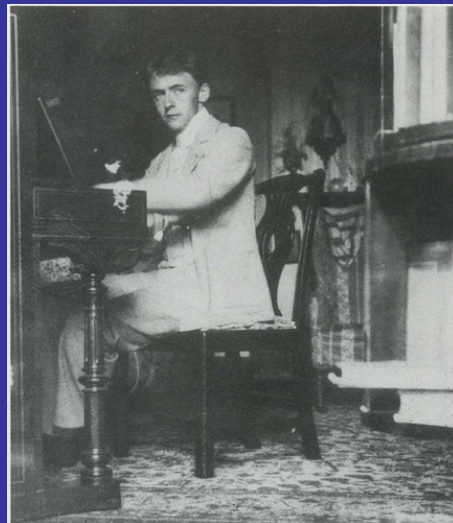
Sir Arnold Bax

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Early Life

- ♪ **Born in Streatham**
- ♪ **Attended the RAM (1900–05), where he studied composition with Corder.**
- ♪ **Fortunate to have a private income, he was able to travel extensively as a young man. Ireland was a favourite destination, also Dresden and Russia.**

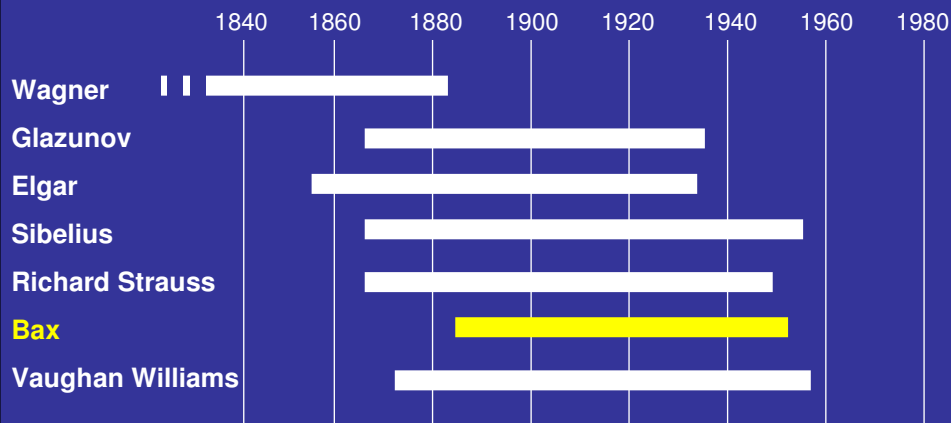


Bax at the piano, c.1901

Marriage and Poetry

- ♪ Married Elsita Sobrino, the daughter of a soprano and a pianist. They lived in Dublin until the spring of 1914.
- ♪ In Ireland Bax adopted the pseudonym Dermot O'Byrne, under which he published poetry, short stories and plays.
- ♪ The marriage was not entirely happy, and they separated soon after moving back to England.

Musical Influences



His music was influenced by landscape, Celtic and Irish legends, and Russian music.
He described himself as a 'brazen Romantic'.

Tone Poems

- ♪ Otherwise known as *Symphonic Poems* or *Symphonic Studies*: music describing literary subjects, events in history, landscapes, paintings etc.
- ♪ Liszt is credited with inventing this form, and wrote 13 works of this kind.
- ♪ Other famous examples include several by Richard Strauss, *In the Steppes of Central Asia* by Borodin, *Falstaff* by Elgar, and many by Bax. Some overtures could be considered as tone poems – e.g. *Romeo & Juliet*.

Tone Poems

- ♪ Bax developed a lush, vivid and distinctive orchestral style.
- ♪ His first popular success came with the impressionistic tone poem *In the Faery Hills* (1909).
- ♪ Increasingly complex orchestral music followed including the tone poem *Spring Fire* (1913).

Tone Poems

- ♪ During World War I, Bax wrote the tone poems *The Garden of Fand* (1913–16), *November Woods* (1917) and *Tintagel* (1917–19), all of which represent aspects of nature.
- ♪ However, it is speculated that they also depict some of the emotions that Bax was experiencing at the time.

Harriet Cohen

- ♪ Bax fell in love with the celebrated English pianist Harriet Cohen.



Tone Poems

- ♪ Bax and Harriet would often meet at Amersham station before travelling on to the Crown Hotel. But on one such occasion the weather turned to torrential rain.
- ♪ They ran to the nearby beech woods to shelter from the storm. The event inspired Bax to write his tone-poem *November Woods*. It incorporates his "Harriet" theme, which appears in several other works including *A Romance* and the *Fourth Symphony*.

**Bax lived in Beaconsfield
– and also in Marlow?**

Bax wrote numerous chamber works, including many for solo piano. He dedicated his *Symphonic Variations for piano and orchestra* to Harriet.



He also wrote the *Concertante for Orchestra with Piano (Left Hand)* for her after she had fallen carrying a tray of glass dishes into the kitchen of her London home in 1948 and cut the wrist of her right hand.

Other concerto style works included:

- ♪ *Phantasy for Viola and Orchestra*
- ♪ *Violin Concerto*
- ♪ *Cello Concerto*
- ♪ *Triple Concerto (cor anglais, clarinet, horn)*
- ♪ *Morning Song (Maytime in Sussex)* for piano and orchestra

One of the great symphonists

Symphony No. 1 (1922)

Symphony No. 2 (1926)

Symphony No. 3 (1929)

Symphony No. 4 (1931)

Symphony No. 5 (1932)

Symphony No. 6 (1935)

Symphony No. 7 (1939)

Master of the King's Music

- ♪ This picture was taken in 1942 when Bax was living at the White Horse hotel in Sussex. The other man is Taffy, a Welsh ex-miner who was one of the regulars at the bar.



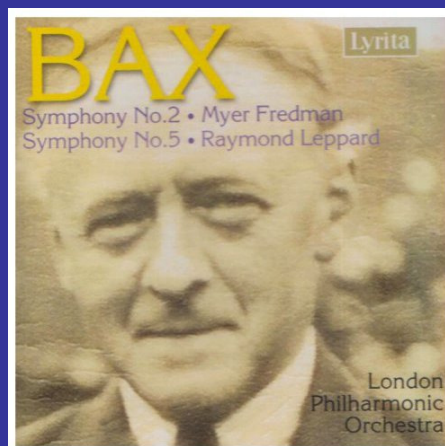
- ♪ The photograph was taken shortly after Bax had been made Master of the King's Music.

The Symphonies

- ♪ Unusually, Bax adopted a three movement format, although scherzo-like themes are often found in the third (final) movement
- ♪ He also introduced an *Epilogue* towards the end of most of his symphonies

Symphony No.5 in C sharp minor (1932)

- ♪ Dedicated to Sibelius
- ♪ "One of my darkest and stormiest works"
- ♪ Third movement: *Poco moderato – Allegro - Epilogue*

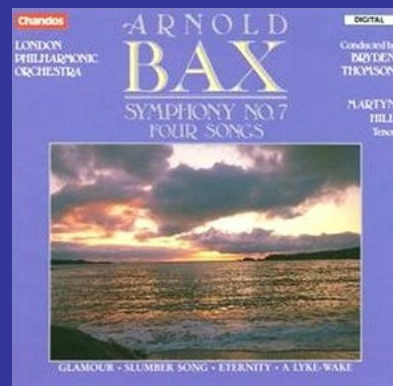


Symphony No.7 (1939)

- ♪ Commissioned by the American people for the World Fair of 1939
- ♪ It is Romantic, relatively calm and serene
- ♪ It has a valedictory quality, as if the composer is taking a lingering and nostalgic farewell to a rich romantic life
- ♪ The first movement is particularly fine. The middle section of the second is marked "In legendary mood".

Symphony No.7 (1939)

- ♪ The third movement is a Theme and Variations, leading into Bax's customary Epilogue
- ♪ *Allegro – Andante – Vivace – Epilogue (sereno)*



String Quartet No.1

- ♪ Dedicated to Elgar: *'I should be very pleased if you will accept this simple work in memory of an unforgettable day and all the pleasure your own music has given me'*
- ♪ Elgar, who produced his own string quartet at about the same time, replied that he *'liked the look of it'*.

String Quartet No.1

- ♪ Written in 1918, but does not reflect the horrors of war
- ♪ This is an excerpt from the first movement: *Allegretto semplice*



Tone Poem: *Tintagel*

- ♪ This has been easily the most played of Bax's concert works and it also remains far and away the most recorded.
- ♪ In his programme notes Bax described "the wide distances of the Atlantic as seen from the cliffs of Cornwall on a sunny but not windless summer day" and "memories of the historical and legendary association of the place, including King Arthur, King Mark, and Tristram and Iseult".
- ♪ Many commentators point out that all their stories revolve around just such love triangles as Bax himself was experiencing.

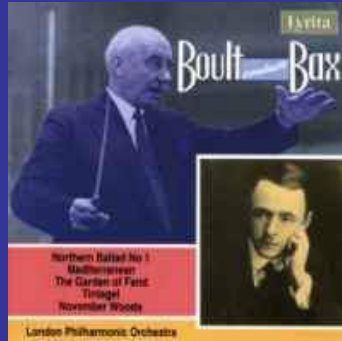
Tone Poem: *Tintagel*



JMW Turner

Tone Poem: *Tintagel*

- In the opening bars Bax paints the breakers (strings) pounding rhythmically way below the castle, whilst flecks of sunlight (harp) glint on the deep swelling Atlantic waters, and a gull (flute) wheels above in the steady breeze.

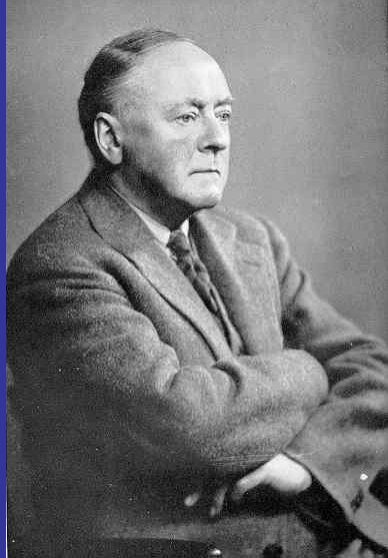


Tintagel

- Here is the main melody, which is heard calmly after the introduction, more menacingly in the central section, and magnificently towards the end



London Pageant



- ♪ Completed in Feb 1937 and first performed 2 days before the coronation
- ♪ Bax's knighthood was announced on Coronation Day

London Pageant

- ♪ Bax based the *trio* on an idea from his student days



London Pageant

♪ In Elgarian terms, this is a cross between the *Pomp & Circumstance* marches and the *Cockaigne Overture*

