

The Havergal Brian Society

Newsletter

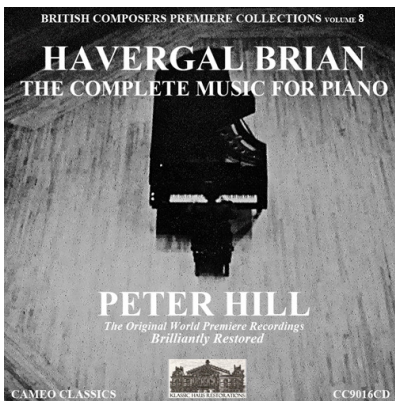
www.havergalbrian.org



228

July-August 2013

Brian Piano music on Cameo Classics



NO sooner was it announced that the first commercially-available recordings of music by Havergal Brian were to be re-issued on CD by Heritage Records, than another classic recording is set to make a re-appearance on CD.

Peter Hill's well-regarded recording of the complete piano music first appeared on Cameo Classics in 1981, supported by Douglas Young in the *Double Fugue in E flat*. There had appeared to be something of a Brian jinx associated with its first appearance on CD however, as the original digital master had gone missing. The CD therefore appeared using a transcription of an original LP version as its source, clicks and all.

Now comes news of a re-mastering of the recording—not from the original master, which is still lost, but from the transcription of a LP that has turned out to be in excellent condition, and was then expertly refurbished by US restorer Curt Timmons. The result is as close to the original recording as it is now possible to get, and is being re-issued by Cameo Classics as volume 8 in its British Composers Premiere Collection, CC9016CD. For purchase details, contact David Kent-Watson on cameo36classics@gmail.com.

In this issue:

'The most unlucky opera ever written'
- part 2 *Malcolm MacDonald*

Reviews: the Heritage CDs
John Whitmore, John Grimshaw

A conversation with Mark Stone
John Grimshaw

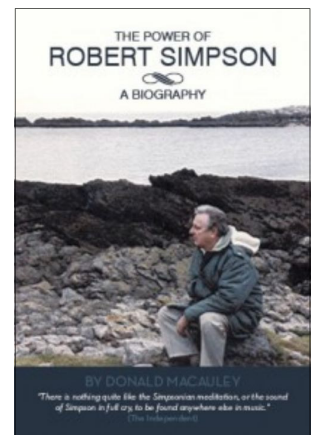
Piano recital review
Martyn Becker

The Power of Robert Simpson

A new biography of Robert Simpson has been published by HBS member Donald Macauley. Simpson was pivotal in the growing appreciation of Havergal Brian from the 1950s when he worked as a producer for the BBC. Not only a BBC producer of course: he was a major symphonic composer in his own right. Simpson's work was (and is) greatly admired by fellow musicians such as Herbert Howells, Edmund Rubbra, Lennox Berkeley, Michael Tippett and Anthony Payne. He was a man of unshakeable principle who spoke out for enduring cultural values, then as now under threat from 'bogus commercialisation'.

Firmly in the classical tradition though modern in language, Simpson's own music was much influenced by Beethoven, Haydn, Nielsen and later, Bach and Bruckner. The book is available together with further information at <http://www.donaldmacauleybooks.com>

Donald writes 'I do hope you get as much pleasure in reading about this remarkable and gifted man as I did researching and writing this biography.'



Accounts Scrutineer

FOLLOWING Mike Lunan's joining the Committee as Membership Secretary, he can no longer properly act as the Society's Independent Scrutineer of the annual Accounts. It is a legal requirement that such scrutiny takes place each year in advance of the AGM at which the Accounts are adopted.

Mike writes that the task is not onerous; the Treasurer supplies figures which are exemplary, laid out clearly and fully, making it straightforward to trace items of income and expenditure. It is not required that this be done to the same standard as a professional audit would attain - the requirement is that the Scrutineer is satisfied, having made reasonable checks and enquiries, that the figures are true and honest. Mike has done this for the past several years, and it generally takes him about 6 to 8 hours, and that includes walking to the Post Office to post the whole lot back to the Treasurer. A fee (£50 or £60 in recent years) is payable for this.

The work comes in one lump in early May. Apart from that there is nothing else to do apart from planning how to spend the £50 (or £60).

The Chairman would welcome a volunteer for this vital position. Distance is no object, as witnessed by the fact that Mike lives in Caithness. Please contact the Chairman at hbschairman@tesco.net.

NEXT ISSUE: The last part of Malcolm MacDonald's article on the genesis of *The Tigers*, plus more.

'The most unlucky opera ever written': how Havergal Brian wrote *The Tigers* – a narrative chronicle from inception to publication as reflected in his letters to Granville Bantock and Ernest Newman—Part 2

Malcolm MacDonald

IN part 1, Brian was robustly defending his libretto for *The Tigers*...

(H. R.) Barbor, whom Brian at first generally referred to as 'Barber' - though in later letters he uses the correct spelling¹³ - seems to have offered Brian a piece called 'Carnival' which he thought could substitute for Brian's own Act I, or perhaps the Prologue. 'I am not sure how far Barber's "Carnival" will fit my work', Brian wrote to Bantock on 16 February. 'I should think there is quite enough stuff in the 1st Act of what I have already done to cover his work. Curiously enough, you did not discover that my music has no nothing relationship with the libretto & was written in spite of it. You remember my showing you some songs at Moseley 10 years ago and a Ballad - 'Carmilhan' - the former since published¹⁴. I worked then on an idea. You put your hands across & asked where the melody was. I say D--- the melody. Look at the lovely melodies in my 'English Suite' and elsewhere. Where are they now? Perhaps on some soft sanitary paper in a ladies lavatory. You never can tell. At present then I await Barber's "Carnival" & if it can be done I will fit it into the first act of my opera. There is a very big aria in it which would suit Mullings¹⁵, and a nonsense song which could be given to the Mayor¹⁶. Barber might write another play to cover the II Act of what I have done. You ought to hear it. It is all built on one musical idea, & big stuff¹⁷. Would you be kind enough to lend a room with a piano at the Institute¹⁸ on Thursday night next¹⁹ at 6pm for 1 hour & I will meet Barber and play the other stuff over. Meanwhile I shall have received his "Carnival" and will know what to do with it. [...] Do you think Beecham would consider a work before it was written?'

A week later he had read Barbor's work and was not convinced it would be suitable: 'Barber will not care, I think, to wait so long as it will take me to set his work, for I don't find that much I have already done will fit his work. He talked the other night of having his "Je[zebel?]"²⁰ produced as a play, independently of the opera

scheme - in which case he would require independent music for it'. And the next day (24 February): 'I think it will be better for me to do Barber's work as a separate opera, when he has given it the touches I suggested to him. My own libretto can be strengthened by the female element if I keep the women introduced in the first act running through the work instead of dismissing them in the 1st Act'²¹.

Brian did not use Barbor's work in *The Tigers*, therefore; nor did he write any independent opera on *Carnival*, *Jezebel* or any other play of Barbor's. He did not forget him, however²², and in November 1918 composed two 'scenas for baritone and piano or orchestra' to texts by Barbor, now unfortunately lost. After 24 February there is no mention of *The Tigers* for quite a while - Brian had other concerns both artistic and domestic in the meantime - but on 23 December he once again reported to Bantock 'I am pegging away at my opera'. On 22 February 1919 he announced 'I will be at the Institute on Thursday²³ at 5pm - with the finished opera' and to Newman he wrote on 24 February 'I finished the opera tonight'. At this point the work was still entitled *The Grotesques*, for Brian mentions it under that title in a letter to Bantock of 1 March, after having showed it to Bantock at the Midland Institute. He continues: 'Your suggestion about the dramatisation of the 'fair' music is a fine one & I'll do it & we'll have it most dramatic. There is a much bigger thing follows the "Kelly" but you didn't hear it²⁴. [...] So I will get the work cleared up, work out the fair business & let you know when I have kicked off'. But only a week later he had apparently finished compositional work on the opera for good, as he reported on 8 March: 'I finished the counterpointing of the chorus in the "finale" last night; so with it ends the creative side of things & now for the most interesting period in its development'. (This is the same letter in which Brian comments on discovering that there was a real 'Tigers' regiment.) He also says: 'Let me ask you to believe that the characters do not represent anything or

¹³ Actually an understandable confusion if he first simply heard Barbor's name spoken, and only later saw it written down.

¹⁴ Bantock moved from Moseley near Birmingham to the manor house of Broadmeadow in King's Norton in 1907, so Brian's '10 years ago' should be at least 11, and more likely 12. The Ballad for chorus and orchestra *Carmilhan*, on a text by Longfellow, is now lost, but was being composed in April 1906 and was probably completed by the end of that month or in early May.

¹⁵ Frank Mullings (1881-1953) was the leading tenor in the Beecham Opera Company (1916-20) and its successor, the British National Opera Company (1921-29). In 1914 Brian heard Mullings sing in Holbrooke's *Dylan* and wrote to Bantock 'I would like to hear him sing some things of mine some day - I've been on the booze with him several times'. The 'big aria' mentioned could be for Pantalon (a tenor) in Prologue Scene 2, but there isn't anything that could reasonably be described as a 'nonsense song'.

¹⁶ There is no Mayor in Brian's libretto as we have it: more probably he was a character in Barbor's piece.

¹⁷ If Bantock had not heard Act II, though he had evidently seen parts of the score, that might seem to confirm it was written last; but Brian's letter of 23 December suggests rather that Act II was already written before he started on Act III.

¹⁸ The Midland Musical Institute, where Bantock was Principal.

¹⁹ That would be 21 February 1918.

²⁰ The word is illegible, but seems to begin 'Je...', and *Jezebel - a tragedy in three acts* by H. R. Barbor was published in 1924 (London: A. Brenton).

²¹ Should we perhaps conclude that Pamela Freebody and the haymaking girls had not yet made their appearance in *The Tigers* as first written?

²² Eastaugh (op. cit., p. 223-224) reproduces - without naming its author - Barbor's worried letter of 21 May 1918 to Bantock; he was evidently being bombarded with missives from Brian and did not know what to make of his habitual OTT style.

²³ That would be 27 February 1919.

²⁴ Does Brian mean 'Wild Horsemen'?

anybody. You may have thought they did and perhaps in some wild moment I wrote and may have identified someone with them. The opera must be taken for what it is worth at its face value – the characters are symbolical of something deeper. Any thoughts of ink slinging at one's friends or the British Army must at once be dismissed. Life is too short for either task'. In a letter to Newman on 27 March he reports 'I've done nothing more with the opera – I enjoyed the delirium of creating it & – it cannot happen again'.

This account anchors the actual composition of *The Tigers* in a time-frame of early February 1917 to 7 March 1919. In fact there were to be no further developments with it for a considerable interval, and henceforth mention of the opera virtually disappears from his correspondence with Bantock. Not, however, from his letters to Newman.

Perhaps because the Beecham Opera Company was already in financial difficulties and unable to take on such an ambitious work, Brian left his draft un-orchestrated; after moving in mid-1919 to London, then Eastbourne, and finally to Lewes he did, however, begin to make a proper vocal score. On 22 October he wrote to Newman 'I am slogging at my opera trying to get the vocal score ready by Xmas & send it to Beecham. I have never worked under such difficulties before & there are moments when I find myself wondering if the game is really worth a dead candle'. This 1919 vocal score is, presumably, distinct from the one made at Moulsecocomb in 1926-27; or maybe it formed the basis for it. There is nothing to tell us whether it was finished or abandoned, or whether it got sent to Beecham. After this, perhaps because of his own acute financial straits, or his unsettled life, or because his imagination had been seized by the need to begin composing an even more ambitious work – the *Gothic Symphony* – he then allowed the opera to languish in draft for nearly ten years, though he was certainly on the lookout for ways in which its music could be exploited. For example, in December 1921, Brian allowed a 4-bar extract from the opera to be published as a supplement to Volume 1, No. 5 of the magazine *Fanfare*, edited by his friend Leigh Henry, under the title *Fanfare from 'The Grottesques'*²⁵.

Much earlier in that year – on 10 March, by which time he was living in Marine Square, Brighton, Brian had written to Newman asking if he could help retrieve scores previously sent to Beecham. 'I have several promised

orchestral performances coming off²⁶ and I think it advisable to perform my 'Kelly' variations from the opera. I scored these several years ago & sent the score, together with the score of an orchestral suite to Beecham addressed at the Aldwych Theatre. I sent several letters to Baylis²⁷ asking for the return of these if TB did not want them – but I did not even get a reply. Since Baylis' death I have not troubled and I don't know where the Beecham library is kept or who is in charge of it. Will you give me a hand in this matter because I am absolutely lost as to who to approach on the matter'.

This letter raises several conundrums. As we have seen, the 'Kelly' Variations was being orchestrated in February 1918 with a view to interesting Beecham, and was presumably sent off to him then (thus 'several years ago'). But what of the 'orchestral suite' sent 'together' with it? It looks suspiciously as if this was *English Suite No. 2*, which has heretofore been firmly dated in 1915 and presumed lost since sent to Beecham that year, never returned, and never located despite searches of his library. Thus in a letter of 16 October 1915 to Bantock, HB says he had recently 'sent it in for an orchestral competition of which Beecham is the principal adjudicator. I did it out of loyalty to him'. Did Brian conflate two different occasions when recounting the fate of *English Suite No. 2* to Reginald Nettel nearly thirty years later?²⁸ Sending a score to an 'unknown Competition Committee' (as he refers to it later in the same letter) is not the same as sending it to Beecham at the Adelphi Theatre. Did the committee return the *Suite* to Brian, and did he then send it direct to Beecham separately in 1918? Or is this a distinct, entirely unknown 'orchestral suite' (because 1918 is too early for it to have been *English Suite No. 3*)?²⁹ The difficulties do not end there. Whether or not Newman came to Brian's aid, the fact is – or would seem to be – that he eventually got the score of the 'Kelly' Variations back, since it was premiered under Sir Dan Godfrey in 1924. If the 'Kelly' Variations, why not *English Suite No. 2* (or whatever suite it was)? Or maybe – vertiginous thought, but not all that unusual in Brian's career – he didn't get the 'Kelly' Variations back, and was forced to make a new orchestral score?³⁰ In fact, this may well have been the case, for on 13 March he told Newman not to 'bother about the scores I sent Beecham. I was in town yesterday & was informed by Mr Felix Goodwin³¹ – who has control of the Beecham library – that neither of

²⁵ The extract includes a reference to 'Colonel Toby', evidently an early identity of Sir John Stout. See *Newsletter No. 10* (1977) for a description of the tiny manuscript. [Reproduced on the front page of this edition. –Ed.]

²⁶ Presumably referring to the forthcoming performances of *Festal Dance*, *Fantastic Variations on an Old Rhyme* and *In Memoriam*, all of which took place during 1921.

²⁷ Donald Baylis, Beecham's secretary and by 1913 general manager of his opera company. Alan Jefferson, in *Sir Thomas Beecham, a Centenary Tribute* (London: MacDonald & Jane's, 1979), pp. 128-9, has suggested that Baylis was in fact an illegitimate son of the conductor's father, Sir Joseph Beecham, and thus Thomas Beecham's half-brother.

²⁸ See the account in Nettel, *Ordeal by Music* (OUP: 1946), pp. 65-66: 'Beecham's complete indifference to routine tasks was remarkable. In 1914 [sic] Brian sent him three scores, one of which (his *Second English Suite*) was never returned. At the time of Beecham's threatened bankruptcy diligent search was made for this score among his effects, without result [...]'. This passage is reproduced unchanged in Nettel's *Havergal Brian and his Music* (Dobson: 1976), p. 51.

²⁹ Nettel does mention three scores, so maybe the list was *English Suite 2*, 'Kelly' Variations and 'Unidentified Orchestral Suite'? A possible contender for the latter work might be the lost *Three Comedy Dances* – Brian's arrangement of the *Three Illuminations* for small orchestra, which had occupied him just before starting work on *The Tigers*.

³⁰ It is probably worth reminding readers that Brian's autograph full scores of the 'Kelly' Variations and of all five of the *Symphonic Dances* are lost. The scores of the Variations, *Wild Horsemen*, *Green Pastures*, *Gargoyles* and *Shadow Dance* were reconstructed by me for Cranz & Co. from the existing sets of parts in 1971-72. There were no parts for *Lacryma*, which thus remained unperformable until the recovery of the full score of *The Tigers* itself.

³¹ For whom see Brian's obituary-remembrance printed as part of *On the other hand*, by La main gauche, *Musical Opinion*, March 1935, p. 494.

my things could be traced.’

On 6 May he acknowledged receipt of a parcel from Newman: ‘I am so glad to have your letter & parcel and know that you like the work. The opera is full of things of that sort – that I sent to you. I shall turn the whole thing into a series of suites for orchestra, or piano – just do the reverse of Granados’³². Evidently the parcel contained some of the *Symphonic Dances* in short or piano score, for on 23 December Brian informed Newman ‘that the Dances you saw last May April from the opera which came into being through you & B are to receive their baptismal fire at a Goossens concert. I heard from G this morning. I don’t know how it will be done for at present only two of them are scored and I want to find someone who will stand the [indecipherable word] of this production as far as the material is concerned & [two indecipherable words] it. Perhaps we might have the opera put on some day when it is a complete work. Anyhow – I show how much I believe I owe to you for stimulating this thing [...]’.

It would be interesting to know which two of the Dances were already scored: that remark belies the statement in the opera full score that all five were orchestrated in 1922. It’s possible that the two were the ‘two new scores finished’ that he had mentioned in a letter to Bantock on 20 August; and on 19 September he sent Bantock ‘a couple of scores’, unspecified – though it appears from a later letter that one of these was *English Suite No. 3*. On 15 January 1922 Brian wrote to Newman that ‘I have had to rearrange all my affairs to score those things for Goossens which I gave to you [these 3 words added in the margin, apparently replacing ‘wrote you about’ although that phrase is not cancelled] – at this moment I don’t know which he wants or how many of them’. To Bantock on the 22nd, in what had become a habitually vaguer vein, he declares ‘I’ve finished a number of scores’ without mentioning either Goossens or the Dances. On 8 March, thanking Newman for the help he had given in a dispute Brian was having with Breitkopf & Härtel, he said he would ‘like to show appreciation in some way. I always said that I would put your name across the opera you inspired’³³. I don’t think it ever will be completed. There is no scope for such a thing in this country & the prospects seem more & more remote now that Beecham has left the field. It is the most unlucky opera ever written. It has brought a sheaf of bad luck in its train. [...] Even the dances which I took out & scored for Goossens – one hasn’t ever heard of the resumption of the Goossens Concerts since he agreed to perform these dances in November last. I don’t profess to look at these things as you, psychologically – I only think it d--- funny that so much evil follows my work. How the d--- is it – I didn’t write it with an evil mind. [...]’

Goossens’s venture eventually collapsed from lack of funds, but Brian then tried to raise the money to publish

the Dances through subscriptions. He discusses this in one of the few letters to Bantock that specifically mentions *Tigers* material, on 4 May: ‘The subscriptions will not go beyond publishing the 5 dances two of which I played to you at the Institute’³⁴. I call them

*5 Symphonic Dances
for Orchestra*

They are only from the opera I wrote in B’ham & I think the printed scores & a piano edition could be put on the market now very cheaply. I should not publish the orchestral material unless I get promises of more subs.’ Eventually this scheme was abandoned – Brian reported to Bantock on 13 June that he had been unable to raise enough subscriptions – and so the Dances remained unpublished. But some at least of the opera extracts were eventually performed, and were indeed almost the only music from *The Tigers* to be heard before the opera’s studio premiere in 1983. The *Symphonic Variations on ‘Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?’* was first performed in Bournemouth under Sir Dan Godfrey in February 1924, while *Wild Horsemen* and *Gargoyles* were premiered under Bantock at the BBC’s Thames Wharf Studio in March 1934³⁵.

Godfrey’s performance of the *Variations* brought Brian a letter from a member of the audience that really got under his skin, and this was the proximate cause of his writing the long self-justifying letter to Bantock of 10 March 1924 which begins with the account of Beecham and Newman suggesting he write an opera already quoted. Brian then continues (with emphatic underlining and quintuple exclamation-marks): ‘With T.B.’s blessing I got to work and by the end of November the libretto was written & I was well away with the opera – the first act was finished in the following February. Of course I played most of the music to you at various times. [The letter-writer claims] my opera was ‘inspired’ by a lady I met in Birmingham while I was at the National Shell Factory working there!!!! [...] I did not go to the National Shell Factory until April 1917 – when most of the opera was written. There is no lady in the opera at all except a creation of my own imagination. [...] The choicest bit, really very choice is that the *Variations* out of the first act played recently by Godfrey had been much influenced by Gustav Holst!!!! My reply to that is, that the only work by Holst which I have heard, was performed in 1913 at the B’ham Town Hall – the same night that Harrison³⁶ produced my ‘*Doctor Merryheart*’ & I’ve heard nothing of Holst since. My impression of his work was that it was unusually brilliant & there was a fine joke in the finale & this was confirmed recently in some work I did for Curwen in proof-reading’³⁷.

©Malcolm MacDonald 2013
To be concluded in NL 229

³² Granados’s opera *Goyescas* was developed from his eponymous series of piano pieces.

³³ To ‘put someone’s name across’ was Brian’s usual phrase for dedicating a work. In the event *The Tigers* bears no dedication.

³⁴ No indication when this may have happened, but they may have been the two which were already scored in 1921.

³⁵ *Gargoyles* had previously featured in a BBC New Music Rehearsal, conducted by John Ansell, in December 1927.

³⁶ Julius Harrison. The concert took place on 3 January 1913.

³⁷ Holst’s work was *Beni Mora*. Interesting that Brian seems to have proof-read the score published by Curwen. That he afterwards got to know a great deal more of Holst is shown by his various writings about him for *Musical Opinion*.

A Conversation with Mark Stone

John Grimshaw talked to Mark Stone at this year's AGM about the baritone's career, and his recordings of Havergal Brian's complete solo songs.



JG: I believe you started off in the financial world?

MS: Well, I kind of drifted into finance. I studied maths at university with a desire to become a chartered accountant. Then when that didn't do it for me, I went into corporate finance with one of the big banks. After seven months, I decided to take the great leap; this was in 1993. I'd sung as a boy and I didn't have a family at the time, so it was a good time to abandon everything, I think.

JG: Did you find that the music business picked up quickly? Or slowly?

MS: I went to music college, although bizarrely, the day after I handed in my notice at the bank, I was head-hunted for an accountant's job! As music college didn't start for a year, I did the job part-time, along with work as an ad-hoc chorister at Opera North. I spent three years at the Guildhall, singing in the Barber of Seville, and a triple-bill of German opera.

JG: What was your first professional engagement?

MS: Opera North again: Escamillo in *Carmen*.

JG: You're now becoming known for English song: how did you decide that you'd want to make this your own?

MS: I liked art-song in general, but I couldn't imagine why anyone would want a disc of me singing lieder when there were German singers doing it much better, and equally, I thought that English song was as good as German lieder, but neglected. At Guildhall, we sang lieder, Italian arias—but no English songs. Which is bizarre, because I think you need to learn how to sing in English—even if you are English. Going abroad, a lot of people say that English singers who go to work in their languages, even though they have no idea how to speak the languages, they have very good diction, because they think about it in a different way. You have to think about the diction of a language completely separate to understanding it.

JG: Do you find that there's much demand for you to give English song recitals, or are you asked more to do other things?

MS: More English song in this country, certainly. I don't think that there's a big market for song recitals anyway: I think people are more interested in opera galas, *Carmina Burana*... But there's a wealth of repertoire that I'm still just starting to investigate.

JG: Yes, it's a very rich field; there's just so much that's not performed at all.

MS: In the twentieth century, thinking about art-song in general, I think England had the *crème-de-la-crème* of what was being composed; we should be very proud of it.

JG: So how did the idea of setting your own record company come about, and what appeared to be a comprehensive attack on the English song repertoire?

MS: Well, I came up with the idea of recording the complete songs of Quilter because when I was at music college, I had copies of a few of the songs and I quite liked them: and no-one else seemed to be singing them, so I thought it would be a good idea to collect them together, there must be about thirty or so. So when I got copies of all 142 songs(!), I thought I should put together a project to record them. We approached Onyx but by the time we got around to it, my contact had moved to Sony. So we release a double-CD of Quilter songs which sold in moderate and perfectly-acceptable numbers, but not enough for Sony to continue the project. So I thought that it couldn't be much more effort to continue the project myself. There was a lot more work—but by that time I'd already done it!

JG: And so to the Brian songs. What did you first think when you saw them? Be honest!

MS: What I thought then as now was the variety across the songs; I get the feeling that he was experimenting. There are some very traditional-sounding songs, and then some quite peculiar ones.

JG: I think he was caught between the need for self-expression, and the desire to sell them, as they were mostly written at a time when he was finding it hard to support himself.

MS: It's like in the symphonies, when he was obviously thinking in huge gestures. It's hard when looking at the three lines of a song setting to get a feel for the sweep that he was thinking about.

JG: How do you prepare a song for recording?

MS: I always write the CD notes first before I go into the recording studio, as if you write them afterwards, you may come across interesting facts that might have affected the way that you interpreted them. So I like to find out about the history of the composer and the song, and then look at the poem. So in a way, the music, and how it lies in the voice is probably the last thing to be thought about.

JG: Did you find any of the songs in particular had something special to them?

MS: Yes, there are some that I thought would fit well in a recital, when I was recording them—and I still think that—and also, the ones that weren't immediately obvious to me as a performer, I come back to them and think, 'yes, there's really something about them'; for example, the two Blake songs on disc 2. They're peculiar, but wonderful. Some of the songs' word-settings are taxing, but they don't sound as peculiar as it felt at the time!

JG: Does Brian fit into the canon of English song writers?

MS: He fits in as well as Delius fits in—which is not very well! He stays in a particular style for about three songs, and then the next few are completely different. That makes him very difficult to categorise because the songs are so different. Some of the early songs sound like Brahms, and some of the later ones like Wolf. So maybe he doesn't fit in well with the English song tradition.

©Mark Stone 2013, abridged, photos Martyn Becker

The Heritage LSSO release

John Whitmore and John Grimshaw reminisce about 'an ideal introduction to Havergal Brian's art'

Havergal BRIAN (1876-1972)

The First Commercial Recordings

Symphony No.10* [18:07]; **Symphony No.21** [29:08]; **Symphony No.22** (*Symphonia Brevis*)** [9:10]; **Psalm 23**** [15:47]; **English Suite No.5** (*Rustic Scenes*) [22:28]

Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra conducted by

James Loughran*, Laszlo Heltay** and Eric Pinkett with Paul Taylor (tenor) and the Brighton Festival Chorus (Psalm 23).

rec. 18-19 July 1972 and June 1974, De Montfort Hall, Leicester; Hove Town Hall, 10 April 1974.

HERITAGE HTGDC 256/7 2 CDs [95:02]



THIS Heritage release, due to be launched in September [but available to members now: see order form in NL 227.—Ed.], restores to the catalogue the first commercial recordings ever made of Havergal Brian's music and for its historic significance alone the 2 CD set deserves a warm welcome. Symphonies 10 and 21 were recorded by Unicorn in 1972 and the coupling was available on vinyl and then

briefly on a rather dry sounding CD reissue some years later. The works on the second CD were recorded by CBS in 1974 but have not been reissued since the original CBS Classics LP release in 1975. The Heritage audio engineers have used the original masters as a starting point to produce this reissue.

I urge potential listeners not to be put off by the fact that the musicians involved are amateurs. "Schools orchestra" - the very term can send a shiver down the spine. It conjures up thin, painful strings and crude, out of tune playing. Well, to quickly put that concern to bed, the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra made commercial LPs for the Pye and Argo labels under the direction of Sir Michael Tippett, Sir Arthus Bliss and André Previn just a few years before these Brian sessions took place. In the 1970s the orchestra's patron and regular conductor, Sir Michael Tippett, compared it favourably to the National Youth Orchestra. Despite occasional lapses of intonation and a few bars where the youngsters are stretched close to their limits their playing is really quite remarkable in terms of its musicality, technical assurance and poise.

As far as repertoire is concerned I can think of no better introduction to the varied sound world of Havergal Brian than the music that is on offer here. We have two short but magnificent symphonies (10 and 22), an attractive choral work and a quirkily original orchestral suite. Thrown in for good measure is the only currently available recording of the very approachable Symphony No. 21.

Many sceptics have an entrenched view of Brian as being a self-taught amateur, big on ideas but small on content and ability. He's the man who produced music with so many lines of confusing counterpoint that all you end up hearing is an opaque, grey, orchestral mush. He also specialised in composing massive,

impractical scores with the occasional kitchen sink thrown in for good measure. Well, some of these observations may contain elements of truth but none of them apply to any of the works featured here. I don't sit in the camp that claims that Brian is a great composer but I object to him being dismissed out of hand because of unfounded misconceptions and generalisations. His huge output was admittedly inconsistent but at his best Brian has something to say and he's worth hearing. Brian has been treated rather shoddily over the years by the musical establishment (whoever they may be) and he deserves more respect and credit for his achievements. There's some fabulous, uplifting music to be heard on this Heritage set. Be warned - some of it can become addictive!

Symphony No. 10 is permanently engraved on my mind and has been since encountering it on the original Unicorn LP. It opens with a gripping march and fragments of this opening theme form the basis of everything else that follows. The music is often meditative in nature but there's always an underlying menace about it. There are passages of utter stillness that catch the ear. One such passage (great *pianissimo* playing from the orchestra) eventually erupts into a furious storm which then quickly subsides. The changes of mood and pace are what make this symphony so special. A violin solo takes us into the world of English pastoral music but Brian then engulfs the mood of serenity and calm with one final cataclysmic upheaval before the music quietsens down again. The composer then delivers the most astonishing and hair-raising of endings: the violin returns, the mood becomes dark, lonely and introspective and the work finishes with a question mark hanging over it. This is a tremendous symphony and the inspired performance is as good as you could reasonably expect from a youth orchestra. Some of the playing is jaw-dropping in its brilliance. The sense of danger and discovery is tangible. Martyn Brabbins has recently recorded the 10th for Dutton but despite the higher level of orchestral execution his version seems to lack the magic and atmosphere conjured up by Loughran in Leicester. Incidentally, you can sample the 10th symphony and watch extracts from the LSSO recording session on YouTube at this link: http://youtu.be/9f7_wiFeDIU

Brian is accused of composing mammoth, overblown impractical works but this can be brushed aside by listening to Symphony No. 22, running as it does for just over 9 minutes. Written in 1964/65 when he was in his 80s, the general mood is one of menace and impending doom. Had it been written in the late 1930s it could be argued that it was the composer's reaction to the imminent outbreak of war. The march rhythms, so typical of Brian, conjure up visions of the military and the gathering of dark clouds. Moments of repose are regularly brought crashing down and the ending is magical - it's another question mark "what next?" The work has less immediate appeal than the 10th but it's one of those pieces that can quickly get under your skin. An awful lot happens in its highly compressed time-span. Heltay's performance is superb and the LSSO rises to the challenge. The recent Naxos version by Alexander Walker has superior orchestral playing but there's not much in it, and the LSSO is in no way totally outclassed. Walker also adds an irritating pause between the two movements thus destroying the continuity of the symphony and he totally misses the mood of foreboding at the very end. Laszlo Heltay generates more atmosphere and bite and in truth the thinner string tone of the LSSO allows the listener to hear more inner detail compared to the luxuriant, smooth sounds generated by the Russian forces on Naxos. The LSSO versions of 10 and 22 are still arguably the ones to go for.

Symphony No. 21 is good natured and pastoral in mood. It's less angry than many of Brian's pieces and there's something very

genial about it. The heart of the symphony is the beautiful slow movement which in turns can be elegiac and then grave with sudden outbursts of brass sonorities underpinning the string-laden texture. This music is a nod in the direction of Vaughan Williams and the string section copes very well with the exposed, legato writing it is asked to deliver. The ensuing scherzo is mercurial and playful, allowing the orchestra to display its virtuoso capabilities to the full with its scampering woodwinds and imposing horns. The finale has passages of Brianesque grimness and anti-romanticism about it but there are also some light, melodious interludes (lovely work by the flautist). The momentary lapse in string ensemble at the very beginning should have been given a retake but no matter - Eric Pinkett's realisation of the work is well worth hearing. Towards the end he propels the music forward and in his hands the symphony comes to a glowing, optimistic close.

The orchestra has a whale of a time in the English Suite No. 5. This is almost light music but not quite. Brian continually adds some quite bizarre twists and turns into the fabric and the music isn't always as straight forward as it would appear to be from the titles he has given to the four movements. The opening *Trotting to Market* bounces along quite nicely but then we keep encountering pauses and gear changes. Do the horses keep stopping for a break or do the cart wheels keep falling off? Either way it's very congenial, as is the closing movement, *Village Revels*, with its high spirits, attractive folk dance tune and blazing final bars. The two central movements are the most satisfying and original. *The Restless Stream* is quite remarkable. Written for woodwind and percussion (with horns included at the very end) the music bubbles away but there is something quite uncomfortable and sinister lurking underneath the surface. This short intermezzo could have been penned by Nielsen in one of his stranger moods. The highlight of the suite is the stunning *Reverie* scored for strings alone. Running for the best part of 10 minutes this dark elegy is English to the core but it treads a different path to the likes of Vaughan Williams and Elgar. This is Brian at his most inspired. This is intensely grave and searchingly tragic music, expertly scored and beautifully played by the LSSO string section.

Brian's Psalm 23 has its foundations firmly rooted in the English choral tradition. Despite being tuneful, confident and uplifting the work seems to be missing all the usual Brian fingerprints of originality. It's structurally sound and enjoyable to listen to but it's hard to make any huge claims for it. The Brighton Festival Chorus and tenor soloist Paul Taylor sing confidently throughout but the orchestra, by its own superlative standards, sounds slightly less secure than usual. Some entries are tentative and the flute and oboe intonation could have been improved. Maybe the players didn't quite have the notes under their fingers. However, it's still a good performance. Heltay captures the spirit of the work and the orchestra and choir clearly understand and enjoy its idiom.

So now to the quality of the CD transfers. The Unicorn 10/21 coupling taped at De Montfort Hall was always a good recording on vinyl but rather less appealing when it was reissued on CD. The Heritage transfer is excellent with a natural balance, clarity, warmth and good clean bass. The off stage trumpet and horn solos both sound as if they come from another world and all the climaxes have tremendous presence and bite. This is analogue sound at its finest. The CBS LP was never very easy to enjoy with its scrawny, fizzy strings and over-bright percussion. The Heritage transfer is a miraculous improvement. Symphony 22 and Psalm 23, although recorded in Hove Town Hall, sound very similar in quality to the Unicorn De Montfort Hall sessions. The chorus in Psalm 23 is clean and imposing with wonderfully clear diction. The ruinous end of side distortion encountered on the LP is absent, thus giving the climaxes plenty of air. The engineering in English Suite No. 5, supervised by a different producer, is more "Phase Four" in its approach. Everything is very closely recorded and there are a few extraneous noises to be heard (bow taps and the like). However, there's no doubting the physical impact of the music making - glorious horns, highly detailed woodwind and clear percussion. The string tone is bright and sweet and the cellos and basses are impressively realistic.

In summary, this set could convert some new listeners to Brian's music. The playing is never less than good and it is often brilliant. This should be in the collection of anyone even remotely interested in British music. Bravo!!

©John Whitmore 2013

FOR Havergal Brian fans of an increasingly-advancing age, these pioneering recordings have a favourite place in the mind that can never quite be superseded by their later companions in the still-growing Brian discography. I have described in an earlier *Newsletter* my first exposure to Brian that came with the LP issue of this recording of symphony 10 in 1973. I found the opening of the symphony one of the most memorable things I had heard and it was not long before I was set by it on the path of trying to collect recordings of as many Brian works as possible. That disc was soon followed by the other LP re-mastered here together with the justifiably-lauded Lyrita recording of symphonies 6 and 16. Surely there have been few modern composers so lucky in the quality of the performances that launched his or her presence on disc. One wonders whether the subsequent Brian revival would have achieved half the speed it did without such impressive and approachable "samplers" of his large output.

The Unicorn-Kanchana disc of symphonies 10 and 21 did have a brief CD incarnation in the 1990s, though it did not remain in the catalogue for long. The CBS LP did not even enjoy that new lease of life and for many years the whereabouts and even the existence of the master tapes were in doubt. At least two members attempted to track them down in the CD era but without any luck.

The present issue has been made possible by the persistence of HBS members John Whitmore and Martyn Becker. As the notes with the CD make clear, John was a member of the LSSO at the time of the recordings and has more recently fulfilled the role of LSSO Archivist. It was his persistence that finally tracked the master tapes to the Sony Powergate storage facility in London. Martyn Becker was the committee member who contacted Heritage Records, since they had recently reissued some Unicorn-Kanchana Delius discs in a boxed set and we thought they might therefore be interested in reissuing the Brian 10 & 21 from the same source. The rest is, as they say, history.

There will be more reviews than mine in the pages of the *Newsletter*, so I'll try to be brief. Suffice it to say that in forty years of listening to these performances, I have never heard them in such clear sound as they enjoy on these discs. The detail one can hear that never really came through on black disc makes one wonder all the more about the sheer ability of these young players. Just listen to the playing of the *vivace* of Symphony 21 where the agility of all the players comes together to absolutely electrifying effect. The performances are amazingly alive for what was totally unfamiliar music in a difficult style.

In each case where there is a more modern professionally-played commercial release, there are moments where these performances still reveal more to the music and the recordings of symphonies 10 and 22 and English Suite 5 can certainly hold their own as alternative interpretations against Martyn Brabbins, Alex Walker and Garry Walker respectively. Indeed, the performance of Psalm 23, although not quite so clearly recorded to my ears, is a better and more organic performance overall than that by the RLPO and Chorus with Douglas Bostock on Classico. Symphony 21 remains so far the only recording, though the signs are looking good for that not to be the case for too much longer...

In short, even if you have the original LPs or the earlier Unicorn CD then you should acquire these re-mastered versions. Forty years on, they are a testament to what was achieved as a result of the strong advocacy of Robert Simpson and a reminder still how much we all owe to his belief in Brian, and his desire and ability to get some of the music recorded so that others could come to hear and love these works.

©John Grimshaw 2013

Piano recital mini-review

Martyn Becker attended



Gavin Stevens

AN unique conjunction took place in May 2013: possibly the first-ever pair of conflicting Brian performances, neither of which was anything to do with the HBS!

While the English Music Festival was playing host to the *Legend*, two of Brian's

piano works were given their first outing in the depths of rural East Sussex on 25th May.

Local pianist Gavin Stevens included the *Prelude and Fugue in C minor* and *John Dowland's Fancy* as the opening items in the two halves of his first-ever solo recital, at the Union Church in Heathfield. The opening unison *moto perpetuo* of the *Prelude* can be a challenge to any pianist, and Stevens, while not totally on top of all the notes at all times, still gave an assured reading of both this and the *Dowland* prelude, which were both warmly applauded by an almost capacity audience.

©Text & photo: Martyn Becker 2013

Letter to the Editor

I recently discovered a copy of the vocal score of *The Tigers* being offered for sale on the Amazon website and duly purchased it. When it arrived I discovered that it had originally been owned by Kent County Libraries and still contained the borrowing sheet inside the front cover. The dates are interesting since it was borrowed a number of times between May and November 1981, at the end of March in 1995 and in June and July 1991. Since the work was recorded and broadcast in 1983 I have wondered whether the earliest borrowings reflect preparations for that event. If anyone remembers borrowing this score it would be very interesting to hear from them, particularly if they were involved in the preparations for the broadcast performance (which is of course shortly to appear on the Testament label).

One particularly interesting feature of this score is a preface written by Brian which I had been unaware of and reproduce below:

©Martin Grossel

"Apologetio

The enterprise and courage of Messrs Cranz in issuing such a large opera as "The Tigers" demands a word from me as librettist and composer.

In my youth I was stirred by the campaigns of Marlborough. Later I fell under the spell of Napoleon's career, indeed I read everything I could find about him from Bourrienne's Memoirs to Lord Roseberry's "The last Phase".

Though what I say might be disputed, it is my opinion that no writer on Military matters has surpassed the late G. W. Stevens, whose brilliantly written Despatches sent to the "Daily Mail" from Germany during the manoeuvres of the German Imperial Army under the Emperor William II or of Lord Kitchener's Soudanese Black Brigade at the battle of Atbara are amongst the most vivid things ever written in modern journalism. How long I thought of an opera.

Almost thirty years ago Sir (then Mr) Thomas Beecham suggested that I should write an opera for him on one of Ibsen's little known dramas – "The Lady from the Sea". Some time later Arnold Bennett ached with enthusiasm to write the necessary libretto. He offered me a libretto on the subject of "Anthony and Cleopatra" – which was written for a French composer but I never saw it. Then Herr Julius Walther – the famous tenor – sent me a libretto based on Maxim Gorki's "De Profundis" – Walther had acquired the dramatic rights – for an opera, but I did not write it.

During the war, I chanced to meet Sir Thomas Beecham who again mentioned the opera I had promised him years ago. The reminder was sufficient to set the torch alight once again and I plunged into "The Tigers" as a distraction from war horrors. Granville Bantock heard the work as it was written. I was in the habit during the early years of the war of having tea with him several times per week in his room at the Midland Institute Birmingham. At that time the work only existed in pencil sketches; for almost ten years it remained so, though I still continued to hear the tramp of an army.

Havergal Brian"

The Havergal Brian Society

President Martyn Brabbins

Vice Presidents Myer Fredman . Lionel Friend . David J Brown . James Kelleher . Malcolm MacDonald . Leslie Head

Officers

Dr John Grimshaw *Chairman*; 37 Leylands, Viewfield Road, London SW18 1NF john.grimshaw@tesco.net

Mark Henegar § *Vice Chairman*; 132 Watling Street, Telford TF1 2NH +44(0) 1952 271600 henegar.markd@gmail.com

Gary Jobsey *Treasurer*; 3 Barnsway, Kings Langley, Herts WD4 9PW treasurer@havergalbrian.org

Damian Rees § *Secretary* damian_rees@yahoo.com

Committee members (§ Scores subcommittee member)

Martyn Becker *Webmaster/Editor*, Newsletter; 113 Peartree Lane, Bexhill-on-sea, E Sussex TN39 4NS martyn.becker@havergalbrian.org

Mike Lunan *Membership Secretary*; 15 Castle Gardens, Barrock St, Thurso KW14 7GZ membership@havergalbrian.org

Kevin Mandry *Recordings librarian*; 9 Cherry Tree Court, Dee Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 2JW kevinman@btinternet.com

Jeremy Marchant § *Acting chair, Scores subcommittee* jeremy.marchant@havergalbrian.org

Prof. John Pickard *Archivist & Estate/UMP Liaison* john.pickard@bristol.ac.uk

Martin Anderson . Rev R Leonard Hollands . Dr Jürgen Schaarwächter *European representative* j.schaarwaechter@t-online.de

www.havergalbrian.org **UK Registered charity** 275793. **UK Data Protection Act 1984, §33(3)** The Society holds electronic membership records. Would any member objecting to personal data being held in this form please notify the Secretary.

Newsletter The deadline for input into *Newsletter* 229 is **15 October 2013**. Contributions to the Editor on any aspect of Brian or his music are welcome in any form. Articles or letters in the *Newsletter* express their authors' opinions, which are neither necessarily shared by the Havergal Brian Society nor express its policy. Copyright is asserted at the end of each article. The remainder is copyright ©The Havergal Brian Society 2013. Please contact the Editor for permission to use material, which will usually be given. The order form appears in every odd-numbered issue; it can also be downloaded from the website members' area.