2CD

ALBION RECORDS

Bursts of Acclamation

Ralph Vaughan Williams
Organ music and transcriptions

David Briggs plays the organ of
Sacred Heart Church, Wimbledon

Ralph Vaughan Williams: Organ Music and Transcriptions

all except disc 1 track 9

Henry Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth

disc 1 track 9

1	**Prelude 'The New Commonwealth'**	*2'29*
2	**Overture: The Wasps** *(transcribed David Briggs)*	*10'03*
	TWO ORGAN PRELUDES FOUNDED ON WELSH FOLK SONGS:	
3	**Toccata 'St. David's Day'**	*2'09*
4	**Romanza 'The White Rock'**	*2'26*
	TWO MOVEMENTS FROM THE SUITE FOR VIOLA AND SMALL ORCHESTRA *(transcribed Herbert Sumsion)*:	
5	**Carol**	*3'06*
6	**Musette**	*4'34*
7	**A Wedding Tune for Ann** *(edited Christopher Morris)*	*2'23*
8	**Wedding Canon for Nancy**	*2'13*
9	**Fantasia on Aberystwyth** *(Henry Ley)*	*8'56*
10	**Largo Sostenuto from A Sea Symphony** *(transcribed Henry Ley)*	*11'46*
11	**Prelude and Fugue in C minor**	*9'59*

Disc 1 total playing time:
60'06

	THREE PRELUDES FOUNDED ON WELSH HYMN TUNES:	
1	**Bryn Calfaria**	*3'33*
2	**Rhosymedre**	*4'24*
3	**Hyfrydol**	*2'30*
4	**Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis** *(transcribed Peter Beardsley)*	*16'34*
5	**Dirge for Fidele** *(transcribed Alec Rowley)*	*4'34*
6	**Passacaglia on BGC**	*5'52*
7	**Fantasia on Greensleeves** *(transcribed Stanley Roper)*	*3'16*
8	**Land of our Birth** *(Song of Thanksgiving) (transcribed Stainton de B Taylor)*	*4'11*
9	**Alla Sarabanda** *(Phantasy Quintet for Strings) (transcribed Henry Ley)*	*3'21*
10	**Slow Movement from A London Symphony** *(transcribed Henry Ley)*	*11'42*
11	**Antiphon - Let all the World** *(transcribed Henry Ley)*	*3'02*

David Briggs plays the organ of Sacred Heart Church, Wimbledon

Disc 2 total playing time:
63'00

Album total playing time:
123'06

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND THE ORGAN

We have ordered the tracks on these two compact discs with a view to providing two mixed and enjoyable recitals. The notes below deal with works chronologically, rather than following the order of the discs. Each work is cross-referenced by its disc and track number.

Introduction

Ralph Vaughan Williams *(1872–1958)* began violin lessons when he was seven and, according to his second wife and biographer Ursula, soon discovered that he felt much happier with a stringed instrument than he had ever done with the pianoforte; and he also enjoyed singing. He continued to work on the violin and piano at his first school, in Rottingdean. Reaching Charterhouse at the age of 14, he was allowed to practise on the chapel organ. His last four terms there were spent living in the house of the school organist, G H Robinson. An organ was installed for him at Leith Hill Place; we know roughly where it stood, and it cannot have been very big, but it needed one of the servants to blow it, which suggests a pipe organ, but a harmonium with a pedal board cannot be ruled out.

On one occasion he was ordered to put on a Welsh concert at Charterhouse, which Ralph described as his first introduction to the beautiful melodies of the Principality. By the end of his schooldays, Ralph had given up the violin in favour of the viola, and felt that he had the makings of a good string player. His family insisted that if he had to be a musician then he must be an organist, perhaps not realising the difficulties that his already established atheism would make for him.

The "Juvenilia" in the catalogue includes an organ *Sonatina in E flat* and an *Organ Overture* from 1890. Michael Kennedy suggests that works from this period tell us little about RVW except to show his obvious difficulty in finding his natural voice. No doubt somebody will play them one day, but we have not sought them out for this recording.

In 1890, Ralph went to the Royal College of Music, where he studied harmony and composition and had organ lessons from Sir Walter Parratt. He moved to Trinity College Cambridge in 1892. Attendance at Chapel was compulsory, and Ralph was sent for. "I did not see you in chapel this morning, Mr Vaughan Williams". "No Sir". "Perhaps, however, you were in the organ loft?" "Yes Sir, I was". "Well, you can pray as well in the organ loft as in any other part of the chapel". "Yes, Sir – but I didn't".

Leaving Cambridge in 1894 with a B. Mus and a second in History, he returned to the RCM for two more years, still planning an early career as an organist, though he always intended to compose. His organ teacher at Cambridge, Alan Gray, foresaw many difficulties, writing to Sir Walter Parratt on his return to the RCM that "I can never trust him to play a simple service for me without some dread as to what he may do... despite his considerable knowledge and taste on organ and music matters generally ... in fact he seems to me somewhat hopeless". The criticism here is that RVW was unpredictable rather than technically incompetent. Perhaps this fits rather well with the man we think we know.

Ralph Vaughan Williams FRCO

In 1895, Ralph became organist at the 1500-seater church of St. Barnabas, Guildford Road, South Lambeth. This could have been as much because he wanted to live in London as for the annual salary of £50, but it was not an insignificant position. His duties included giving organ recitals, as well as training choir members whom he described in a letter to Holst as "louts ... sloping in to choir practice half an hour late". The two-manual Hill organ of 1850 had been rebuilt with three manuals by Bishop in 1892; it stood at the East end, north of the pulpit and choir stalls. The organ was replaced in 1948 and the church has since been converted into social housing.

RVW continued to study the organ, his first wife Adeline noting that he would practise for 5 hours a day at the organ and piano in this period. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists (FRCO) by examination in 1898. The examiners for the "practical" were eminent organists of the day: W Stevenson Hoyte (All Saints, Margaret Street, organ teacher of George Dyson and Leopold Stokowski), Warwick Jordan (Guildhall Professor of Organ and Harmony), and Sir George Martin (St Pauls Cathedral). The sight-reading test that he undertook on that occasion has been published, and has been described by Relf Clark as a "tricky assignment"; it is simply formidable.

RVW later claimed to "have the distinction of being the only pupil who entirely baffled Sir Walter Parratt", and said "Sir Hugh Allen always insisted I must have bribed the examiners". This and yet more typically self-deprecatory remarks by RVW in later years have perhaps been taken too often at face value, since we have no account of his playing by anybody who heard him play. It is sometimes asserted that RVW could not possibly have played his own organ works. While accepting that his pedal-work must have become a little rusty over the years, we join Relf Clark in suggesting that he must have been a more considerable organist by 1898 than he is generally given credit for.

Furthermore, the church valued his services so much that the vicar (Revd. Walter Edward Hamilton Sotheby) offered to hold the post open while he was studying with Max Bruch in Berlin for six months from October 1897. Can he really have been so terrible? The vicar's offer was accepted, but the post was resigned with relief in 1899 when the church insisted on his taking communion. He clearly disliked the job, and he is not the first organist to find a choir or vicar difficult to work with, but some have suggested that he disliked the organ as well, and there is no evidence for this. It was the end of his time as a working organist, and RVW resigned his membership of the RCO in 1900 – an unsentimental parting from the "letters" that he had worked so hard to achieve just two years earlier and a prelude to life as a composer. His resignation saved him an annual fee of one guinea, perhaps not a trivial sum at a time when he had just given up a regular source of earned income. He spent the rest of his life working with organists and church music as well as playing the piano, thus maintaining his keyboard skills. He wrote that "I habitually and unashamedly use the piano when composing" (despite Stanford's advice not to do so). In 1924 The Royal College of Organists realised that they had lost a distinguished alumnus, and he accepted their invitation to become a Vice-President of the College.

Dirge for Fidele

[2, 5] What a title! RVW could have called it *Fear no more the heat 'o the sun*, and we might feel more inclined to seek it out. The words are from Shakespeare's Cymbeline, and have been set by at least fifteen composers, including the usual suspects: Arne, Boyce, Finzi, Leighton, Lambert, Parry, Quilter and even John Dankworth. Michael Kennedy dates RVW's setting, for two mezzo sopranos and piano (there are recordings by other combinations), to about 1895.

In 1954 Gerald Finzi described Vaughan Williams's "slow, oak-like growth, with his hard-won and entirely personal technique". So a song composed in 1895 is not to be compared with more mature works; we can see that, even at this stage, Vaughan Williams could invent new tunes, and set them with a delicate touch. For all the self-deprecation noted above, the composer had a clear sense of his own worth and that of his compositions, considering the work worthy of publication in 1922. This may have resulted from a re-appraisal of the early works after the silence of The Great War..

The organ arrangement was made in in 1928 by the English teacher, composer, organist and pianist Alec Rowley *(1892–1958)*. A fellow and staff member (from 1920) of Trinity College London, Rowley wrote orchestral and choral works, songs, and many works for piano and organ. He is somewhat neglected now, and a very small number of CD recordings are supplemented by material on YouTube, some of it offering us an insight into a body of Rowley's music awaiting rediscovery. He also made a two-part arrangement of *Linden Lea* in 1949.

Dirge for Fidele is a gentle song, representative of the pastoral side of Vaughan Williams, and this gentleness survives the transcription process.

Overture to The Wasps

[1, 2] The Incidental music for *The Wasps*, a Greek play by Aristophanes, commissioned for a performance of the play in Cambridge in 1909, was a major composition following the studies with Ravel in 1907–8, and an ambitious score. There is one recording of the complete play with the music, which shows us the vocal and orchestral range for which RVW wrote, but he made an orchestral suite of it in 1912, when it was first performed in the presence of King George V and Queen Mary. The *Suite* fits well into a concert programme; this has ensured its popularity, and the *Overture* is often performed on its own. We were delighted when David Briggs offered to make us an organ transcription of that movement especially for this recording.

The buzzing of a swarm of wasps, representing the Athenian judiciary, is evident early on, but Donald Tovey wrote that "the music consists of a brilliant scheme of tunes galore ... in the style of folk-songs. Vaughan Williams ... is among the supreme discoverers and recorders of genuine folk-music; but he can invent better tunes than any that will ever be discovered by research".

A Sea Symphony and Tallis Fantasia

[1, 10] Our next work, completed in 1909 and first performed in the next year, is the slow (second) movement from *A Sea Symphony: "On the beach at night, alone"*. The symphony, RVW's first, which germinated in 1904, is a setting of poems by the American poet, essayist and journalist Walt Whitman. While other early influences faded, Vaughan Williams said that Whitman endured: "I've never got over him, I'm glad to say".

The poet, beneath the stars, sees the glittering ocean as a metaphor for the links between all places, peoples and all living creatures: "All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future, This vast similitude spans them and always has spann'd, And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them." Thus two great artists, Whitman and Vaughan Williams, reflected upon the vastness and eternity of the universe. Wilfrid Mellers wrote that Vaughan Williams's image is worthy of Whitman's words, being one of his earliest manifestations of indubitable genius.

The first performance of *A Sea Symphony* (Leeds, 1910) was attended by RVW's friends George Butterworth and Henry Ley. Ley (pronounced "Lee"), 1887–1962, was a music scholar at the Royal College of Music, and an organ scholar at Keble College, Oxford. He was professor of the organ at the Royal College of Music from 1919. He was a great organ virtuoso, despite having a club foot – Alcock called him the 'Paderewski of the organ'. He played at two coronations and was President of the Royal College of Organists in 1933 and 1934, having been made an honorary fellow in 1920. Ley published his RVW organ transcriptions, including the slow movement from *A Sea Symphony*, in 1922, while organist and choirmaster of Christchurch, Oxford, where his pupils included William Walton and Ralph Downes.

[2, 4] As late as 1953, RVW recommended Ley to OUP as a potential writer of an organ piece based on his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. Ley did not take up this challenge and it has fallen to Peter Beardsley to make a transcription of the work much more recently. Peter Beardsley was Organist and Choirmaster at Christ Church Cathedral (Episcopal) in Springfield MA from 1976 until his retirement in 2012. He holds the M.Mus. degree from Indiana University at Bloomington and is a Fellow of the American Guild of Organists (FAGO). He has studied or coached with Allan Wicks (England), André Marchal (France), Arthur Poister, Clarence Watters, and others.

The *Tallis Fantasia* has long occupied his imagination, partly because of its pairing with two excellent hymn texts in the current *Episcopal Hymnal*, and partly because of the sumptuous string stops on the Austin Organ in the Springfield Cathedral. Learning of David Briggs's Vaughan Williams project was the impetus needed to finish this transcription.

The *Fantasia* was first performed at Gloucester at the 1910 Three Choirs Festival, and the story of the impact that it made on Herbert Howells and Ivor Gurney is often recounted. Tallis's *Third Mode Melody* was published in Archbishop Parker's *Psalter* in 1567, and RVW had used it in *The English Hymnal (1904–1906)*. It is scored for a full sized string orchestra, a second smaller orchestra, and a string quartet. Simona Pakenham wrote: "The serene beauty of the scoring, at times massive, reminiscent of the organ, at times ethereal, when a solo instrument soars in lonely purity against the darkness, has no parallel among string works". The divisional nature of the orchestration lends itself to organ transcription on one hand, and presents considerable challenge in terms of registration on the other; David Briggs was particularly obliged to David Gammie for assistance with changing stops for this recording. The dynamic range is considerable, and the tubular-pneumatic "works" of the Wimbledon organ can be heard in our recording in quiet passages; you have to think of it as added percussion.

Michael Kennedy sums up the contrasts to be found within the *Tallis Fantasia*: "The great spread string chords give the work power, massive spaciousness and a four-square solidity. In its quieter moments there is tender intimacy flowing into lyrical ardour. Best of all is the strong impression that the work is as old as time itself and yet as new as though it had been written yesterday".

Mystics and Phantasies

[2, 11] In 1911, the *Five Mystical Songs* were published, settings of poems by George Herbert. The last of them, *Antiphon*, is well-known as a hymn: "Let all the world in every corner sing". James Day describes it as "noisy rather than energetic". *The Times*, after the first London performance, said that "the spirit of the words is declaimed with extraordinary sympathy, and the words are declaimed in a way which indicates a true musical descendant of Lawes and Purcell". Of the four movements set by Henry Ley, this is the only one that could be described as ebullient, so we chose it to close our two-disc recital.

[2, 9] The *Phantasy Quintet* of 1912 was written at the request of Walter Cobbett, compiler and editor of the *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, to which RVW contributed. His endowment of a prize for English chamber music, The Cobbett Competition, from 1905 to 1919, was responsible for the creation of works by Bridge, Ireland and Howells, among others, all modelled on the 16th and 17th century form of "Fancy" or "Phantasy" – a single movement work, or four sections compressed into a single movement and played without pause. In Vaughan Williams's *Phantasy Quintet* in four movements, prominence is given to viola tone – RVW's own instrument. The *Alla Sarabanda* is the third movement, with the cello silent, the other instruments muted, variously described as "pensive" and "restrained". So, once again, Ley has chosen the gentlest of movements for transcription.

A London Symphony

[2, 10] *A London Symphony* was given its 1914 première just four days after the *Phantasy Quintet*, and gives us our fourth and final Henry Ley transcription. The transcription of the slow movement recorded here is Ley's original and is thus based on the 1920 version of the Symphony.

RVW likened the slow movement to "Bloomsbury Square on a November afternoon", while Butterworth described it as "an idyll of grey skies and secluded byways… The feeling of the music is remote and mystical and its very characteristic beauty is not of a kind which it is possible to describe in words".

The Great War and beyond

RVW's remaining pre-war works (including *The Lark Ascending*, revised and orchestrated after the war) do not appear in this recital. RVW volunteered (at 42) for military service and, from May 1915, he was stationed at Saffron Walden, where he spent some free time playing the organ in the church. In 1916 he went to the front, serving initially in the Field Ambulance Service and later with the heavy artillery, seeing action in France and in Greece, returning on demobilisation in early 1919 to a sadly changed world, with Butterworth and other good friends missing. His music also changed, Kennedy writing that "the folk-song idiom had by now soaked so deeply into Vaughan Williams' creative mind that his music was henceforward, and paradoxically, to be more personal , more individualistically eloquent and more deeply though less obviously 'national'".

It was in 1920–21 that RVW wrote his most significant original works for organ: *Three Preludes founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes*, and the *Prelude and Fugue in C minor*. The *Three Preludes* were dedicated to his Cambridge teacher, Alan Gray, and Relf Clark suggests that he could have been looking back to Victorian Cambridge as a land of lost content. Another factor could have been the appointment of Sydney Nicholson to the Westminster Abbey organ loft, an influential post for a man sympathetic to Vaughan Williams's view of the future of English music.

Vaughan Williams and his music are often described (generally by people who should know better) as "quintessentially English". So it is useful to consider at this point that five of the six organ works published in his lifetime (and one or two orchestral works as well) were based on Welsh hymn or folk tunes. The Welsh roots on his father's side were back in the 18th century, but they were nonetheless important to him. The truth is that he loved a good tune, and there was something about these Welsh tunes that spoke to him.

All three of these Welsh hymn tunes were included in *The English Hymnal* (*Rhosymedre* being indexed by its English name, *Lovely*).

Much of the story of RVW and his music has been written by people who were not interested in organ music, but A E F Dickinson dealt with the organ works and discussed them with Henry Ley; there has been some more recent analysis by organ specialists such as Peter Hardwick and Relf Clark. Relf Clark described the three hymn tunes as "fine, sturdy tunes", but Vaughan Williams's treatment takes them well beyond this. You could easily listen to or sing Bryn *Calfaria* in particular without realising that it has anything to do with the Prelude based on it.

[2, 1-3] RVW intended the *Three Preludes* to be played as a suite, but they are often separated. The first is *Bryn Calfaria* (meaning "Hill of Calvary"). The tune was written by William Owen *(1813–1893)* in 1852. He was said to have written it on a piece of slate on his way to work at the Dorothea Quarry. One of the earlier hymns (just possibly the first) with which this tune was matched was "Look, ye saints! the sight is glorious" written by the Irish Anglican priest Thomas Kelly *(1769–1855)* and published in 1804. The final verse, from which we purloined the title for this release, begins: "Hark, those bursts of acclamation! Hark, those loud triumphant chords!"

This improvisational Prelude begins with a grand statement of the tune's first few notes followed quickly by rhapsodical writing, with constantly changing textures – "swirling arabesques over pedal points adjacent to solid chordal phrases, for instance". The hymn-tune is woven unobtrusively into the fabric of the piece, and the overall effect is of a fantasia on a majestic scale.

The Second Prelude is based on *Rhosymedre* ("Lovely"), written by the Welsh Anglican priest John Edwards *(1805–1885)* sometime after 1843 when he became vicar of the church at Rhosymedre, Denbighshire. This is a sweetly flowing piece, maintaining just one texture and mood throughout. The tune is heard clearly and twice, in long notes, against newly composed, almost dancing, accompanying material and it is largely the latter that the listener retains in memory. This is the best loved of the set; it features prominently in lists of music suitable for both weddings and funerals and it was played at RVW's own funeral in 1958.

Rowland Pritchard *(1811–1887)*, a musician, composed *Hyfrydol* ("Cheerful") in about 1830. RVW's Prelude states the tune at the outset in majestic long notes, and block chording maintains the strength of the piece's solid marching rhythm. The shortest of the three, Dickinson said it was "doubtless enriched by mixture stops ... a queer perfunctory finale", yet it feels like a fully realised conclusion despite that brevity.

[1, 11] The *Prelude and Fugue in C minor* is RVW's masterpiece for organ, completed in 1921, but held back and revised in 1923 and again in 1930, when it was published. At some point (but we do not know when) he took a manuscript draft of it to its dedicatee, Henry Ley, who wrote: "We spent a long evening at it. Asking me afterwards whether I liked it, I replied that I found it too difficult for an organ". If the manuscript was an early version, this encounter might explain why publication was delayed for so long, and then accompanied by a setting for full orchestra (including an organ part). It was the orchestral version that received the first performance, by the LSO under RVW's own baton. It has not had a good critical reception, and the *Prelude and Fugue* possibly works very much better as organ music.

RVW told Ley that the work was modelled on Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in C minor*, BWV 546 (and some detailed comparisons between the works have been made). What it actually sounds like is RVW's *Fourth Symphony* of 1934 – gritty, dissonant, cerebral. RVW's registration called for sixteen-foot stops on the manuals throughout – which most modern organists would consider rather muddy, but was typical of the period. Peter Hardwick notes that the title suggests a tonal work, but there is a strong vein of modality present. David Briggs remarked that the work "goes through most keys" and perhaps anticipates works by William Mathias.

RVW had written the entry on "Fugue" in 1906 for the second edition of Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*: "The subject of a fugue must be of a character to arrest and hold the attention whenever it is heard". He achieved that with the modal first subject of this double fugue, characterised by a repeating descending triplet motif, recalling *Wenlock Edge*. Dickinson said: "This is a more consistent fugue than the later two-piano *Introduction and Fugue*. It is the composer's only true fugue in print. It has sterling quality, and the more trenchant prelude pricks the ears impressively in advance". Relf Clark describes it as "not easy to play", with the need to play duplets against triplets throughout; this is not a piece for the faint-hearted.

The more famous work that was published in 1930 was *Job, A Masque for Dancing*. Scene VI, *The Dance of Job's Comforters*, where we see Satan enthroned, surrounded by the hosts of Hell, includes a part for "Full Organ with Solo Reeds Coupled", supplementing the full orchestra. RVW specified that where "very powerful reeds" are available, certain bars may be played by "organ and timpani only". This use of the instrument dramatically as a contrast, rather than as a supplement, to the full orchestra is an advance on RVW's more conventional bolstering use of the organ in, for instance, *A Sea Symphony*.

Job is music for dancing, and it might be supposed that it should be performed in a theatre, yet Vaughan Williams had sufficient confidence to demand a large organ to go with the full orchestra, without any concern about the restricted number of venues that would result; the drama needed an organ, so he wrote for one.

Henry Ley: Fantasia on Aberystwyth

We acquired scores for more music than we had time to record. Herbert Byard made a transcription of *Aberystwyth*, one of three preludes on Welsh hymn tunes for string quartet that Vaughan Williams published in 1941 under the title *Household Music*. Henry Ley had written his own *Fantasia on Aberystwyth* in 1928. Reviewing these scores, David Briggs described the Byard transcription as "unmemorable, unlike the Henry Ley piece on the same tune, which is rather a corker, I'd say!"

[1, 9] Henry Ley published only three or four organ works (being prolific, though infrequently recorded, in other fields) and the *Fantasia on Aberystwyth* is the best known of these. Thus it came about that we proudly present what we believe to be the first professional recording of any organ work by Ley, complementing his transcriptions of works by Vaughan Williams.

Fantasia on Greensleeves

[2, 7] Vaughan Williams first made use of the Elizabethan tune, *Greensleeves*, in incidental music composed for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for Frank Benson's 1913 Stratford production. There is a direct reference to it in the play, on which RVW's 1928 opera *Sir John in Love*, is based, so the tune appears again in the third act. Ralph Greaves *(1889–1966)*, sometimes described as a light music composer, but whose work extended over a wide range, adapted the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* from the short lento *Interlude* in Act 3, apparently working closely with Vaughan Williams who conducted the first performance of it in the Queen's Hall in 1934. The folk-tune *Lovely Joan* is the basis of the middle section, and it is the variety of tunes that gives this work its appeal.

[Edgar] Stanley Roper *(1878–1953)* was sub-organist at Westminster from 1917, thus working with Sydney Nicholson, and probably knew RVW from that time. As co-editor of *The Oxford Psalter* with Henry Ley, we can take it that he was part of RVW's circle of musical friends. He made many recordings of organ music, and numerous transcriptions. His organ transcription of the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* dates from 1947, when he was organist of the Chapel Royal.

Wedding Belles

If you are an organist, friends often want you to play for their wedding. If you are a composer, still worse: they want you to write something for them. So there were three wedding pieces left in manuscript at Vaughan Williams's death. We make no claim that these occasional pieces are in any way comparable to the significant organ works that we have just been considering, but we are pleased to have been able to record them for the first time, thus making these slighter works available to lovers of RVW's music.

[2, 6] The *Passacaglia on BGC* was composed for "the Bride" on the occasion of the marriage of Miss Barbara Lawrence to Alfred Gordon Clark (ultimately a Judge, but also known as Cyril Hare, the novelist) in 1933. This short work is perhaps the germ of an idea that could have been developed into something more interesting had time and inspiration given it flight.

[1, 7] *A Wedding Tune for Ann* was written for the wedding of Miss Ann Pain to Anthony Wilson in Shere, Surrey, in 1943. Short, simple and tuneful to begin with, the opening statement of the tune is followed by a development section, the tune returning at the end - so the piece has more shape than the *Passacaglia*, but is scarcely characteristic of RVW. OUP published it in their organ album in 1964.

[1, 8] The third wedding piece – again, of course, for the bride – is the *Wedding Canon for Nancy* of 1947, the manuscript charmingly inscribed "With love from Uncle Ralph". RVW called it a "2 in 1 infinite canon", but it is not entirely clear how infinity was to be achieved. A simple piece, no doubt it was designed to be extended and perhaps improvised upon to fill a space in the service. It was written for the marriage of Miss Nancy Harvey to Mr Carol Elias on 30 May 1947.

The Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra

[1, 5-6] Vaughan Williams composed his *Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra* in eight short movements in 1934, dedicating it to Lionel Tertis. The scoring is varied from number to number, so that Frank Howes described the suite as having a "a certain pre-occupation with colour", noting also that the tone of the viola makes a special and inspiring appeal to Vaughan Williams, to be found throughout his output. Herbert Sumsion *(1889–1995)* was organist at Gloucester Cathedral, and the Three Choirs Festival brought him into regular contact with RVW. Sumsion transcribed two movements, *Carol and Musette*, as early as 1938. Daniel Cook (who has recorded these and two more RVW transcriptions by Sumsion) suggests that, in the pastoral lyricism of both pieces, one discerns much of what Sumsion admired in Vaughan Williams.

Prelude: The New Commonwealth

[1, 1] The New Commonwealth has its origins in music written for the film *49th Parallel* in 1940–41. Given five days in which to write the first draft, RVW wrote: "the feeling of urgency is often a stimulus; when the hand is lazy the mind often gets lazy as well, but the composer wants to have the opportunity, when all is approaching completion, to remember emotion in tranquillity, to sit down quietly and make sure that he has achieved the *mot juste* at every point. That is where the time limit inhibits the final perfection of inspiration". The elegiac tune that underpins the *Prelude* in a suite made from the score is one of the most ravishingly beautiful melodies that Vaughan Williams ever wrote. Powerful, and yet gentle and beguiling, with a big cymbal crash at the end, who could resist it?

Recognising that he had a great tune, Vaughan Williams adapted the *Prelude* (without the cymbal crash) as a song for chorus, *The New Commonwealth*, with words by Harold Child, in 1943. Christopher Morris made an organ arrangement of the song, published in OUP's Organ Album of 1960. He was Music Editor, then Head of Music Publishing at Oxford University Press and a talented organist. He retired from the Press in 1985 and died in December 2014. Christopher Morris worked with Roy Douglas in deriving the Cantata *The Pilgrim's Journey* from RVW's opera *A Pilgrim's Progress*.

Land of our birth, from A Song of Thanksgiving

[2, 8] The BBC commissioned *Thanksgiving for Victory* from RVW in 1944, based on a variety of texts, recording it secretly before the war ended. Later on, the title was changed to *A Song of Thanksgiving*. There is no gloating in the piece, but humility and a sense of the cost of war. A review of the complete work suggests that the setting of Kipling's "Land of our birth, we pledge to thee" gets "the 'big tune', of the sort that VW almost always hit out of the park". The fifth of the eight verses that Kipling had written in 1906 reads: "Teach us the strength that cannot seek, by deed or thought, to hurt the weak, that, under thee, we may possess man's strength to comfort man's distress."

RVW's tune uplifts the spirit of that poem, in a transcription by Stainton de Boufflers Taylor *(1903–1975)* that makes the most of the magnificent reed stops at Wimbledon. An author, critic and musician, Taylor was a well-known musical figure on Merseyside, now remembered principally for his handbook on Bach chorale preludes.

The Festival Hall Organ

We come, inevitably, to 1951 and the Royal Festival Hall organ. RVW clearly did not like squeaky organs and wrote to the *Sunday Times*: "I admit that we have some bad organs in England, but at their worst they cannot surely make so nasty a noise as most of those on the Continent. As to the so-called 'Baroque' organ, which, I presume, I have heard at its best at the hands of the most distinguished performers, I can only compare it to a barrel organ in the street. This type of instrument is said to be right for playing Bach. For myself I want nothing better than Bach as played by Dr. Harold Darke on his typically English organ at St. Michael's Cornhill." In fact the organ as completed is regarded as a hybrid rather than a pure "classical" organ and it has been suggested that RVW would very much have liked at least bits of it, if he ever heard it. Ralph Downes, the organ's designer, rose to the challenge in person; giving the first section of the inaugural recital on 18 March 1954, his second item was RVW's *Three Preludes founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes*. No doubt the point was made.

Though the RFH organ has been influential on the design of large organs in the past 60 years, it is fair to say that the classical organ has by no means taken over, and we have come to treasure our best English organs, including the 1912 Wimbledon Walker on which this recording was made. RVW would certainly have approved of it.

Late Works

We note in passing that RVW used the organ again as a contrast with the orchestra in *Sinfonia Antartica (1953)*, underlying Scott's encounter with a wall of ice.

RVW's 1956 anthem *A Vision of Aeroplanes* included a "sizzling" virtuosic organ part, and it is possible that writing film music widened his horizons to make such a work possible. This piece was dedicated to Harold Darke and his St. Michael's Singers, being first performed in St. Michael's Cornhill.

Two Preludes founded on Welsh Folk Songs

[1, 3-4] RVW published his *Two Preludes founded on Welsh Folk Songs* in 1956, two years before his death. There was no dedicatee, and we don't know why he wrote them. They may just have been odds and ends for which he could find no other home. There is no real drawing on the traditions of organ writing, and they could have been intended for other media. Peter Hardwick describes them as written in VW's wholesome, good-natured, pastoral manner. The first, *Romanza*, a chorale prelude on *The White Rock*, returns to the flowing, transparent contrapuntal style of *Rhosymedre* from 35 years earlier.

The White Rock is also known as *David of the White Rock*, or *Dafydd y Garreg Wen*. It was composed by the harpist David Owen *(1712–1741)*, allegedly on his early death bed. Words were added to it a hundred years later, and it became the first broadcast Welsh language song when the BBC opened Station 5WA in Cardiff in 1923.

The second, a *Toccata on St. David's Day*, is a cheerful piece with a somewhat abrupt, inconclusive ending. The earliest Welsh tunes in existence, some half a dozen, are to be found in various editions of Playford's *Dancing Master*, from 1665 to 1718, and *St. David's Day* is one of these. It was described as a "jig" in John Walsh's *The Compleat Country Dancing Master* of 1710. To the extent that it is possible to define a toccata as a musical form, modern examples tend to be rapid and free-flowing. The tune lies deeply buried within RVW's work, which bounces along very much like a jig.

Conclusion

Relf Clark's 2008 observation that some of the major orchestral works have long-sustained string chords that might possibly be a legacy of the experience of improvising on an organ is one that might stand the test of time. However, this essay is the product of research rather than musical criticism and my chief conclusion is that organs were dearer to RVW's heart than we have appreciated, largely as a result of his smokescreen of self-deprecation. He loved Bach's music and counterpoint; and he enjoyed the "big sound" of the organ. It is realistic to presume that he might have been a rather different composer without his studies and work as an organist during a formative period.

Further reading:

1 Michael Kennedy: *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (OUP, 1964, second edition 1980) and *A Catalogue of The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (OUP, 1964, second edition 1996)

2 Ursula Vaughan Williams: *A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (OUP, 1964)

3 A E F Dickinson: *Vaughan Williams* (Faber and Faber, 1963)

4 Peter Hardwick: *British Organ Music of the Twentieth Century* (The Scarecrow Press, 2003)

5 Dr. Relf Clark: *Vaughan Williams and the organ: an anniversary Review* (The Organists' Review, August 2008)

Managing Director, Albion Records
Vice-Chairman and Treasurer, the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society
February 2015

DAVID BRIGGS, ORGANIST

David Briggs is an internationally renowned organist whose performances are acclaimed for their musicality, virtuosity, and ability to excite and engage audiences of all ages. With an extensive repertoire spanning five centuries, he is known across the globe for his brilliant organ transcriptions of symphonic music by composers such as Mahler, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Bruckner, Ravel, and Bach – now with Vaughan Williams added to that list following Albion's commission of a transcription of *The Wasps Overture*. Fascinated by the art of Improvisation since a child, David also frequently performs improvisations to silent films.

At the age of 17, David obtained his FRCO (Fellow of the Royal College of Organists) diploma, winning all the prizes and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. From 1981–84 he was the Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge University, during which time he studied organ with Jean Langlais in Paris. The first British winner of the Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition, he also won the first prize in the International Improvisation Competition at Paisley. Subsequently David held positions at Hereford, Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals. He is currently Artist-in-Residence at St James Cathedral, Toronto.

David's schedule includes more than 60 concerts a year, spanning several continents. Deeply committed to making organ music vibrant for future generations, he enjoys giving pre-concert lectures designed to make organ music more accessible to audiences. In addition, he teaches at Cambridge (UK), frequently serves on international organ competition juries, and gives masterclasses at colleges and conservatories across the U.S. and Europe.

David Briggs is also a prolific composer and his works range from full scale oratorios to works for solo instruments. He has recorded a DVD, and 30 CDs, many of which include his own compositions and transcriptions.

ADRIAN LUCAS, PRODUCER

Adrian Lucas is a freelance organist, conductor, composer, and recording engineer. He was organ scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, from 1980 to 1983, touring internationally with the Chapel Choir and recording a number of discs.

Having held posts at Norwich and Portsmouth Cathedrals, in 1996 he became organist and director of music at Worcester Cathedral and artistic director of the Worcester Three Choirs Festival. He made several recordings with Worcester Cathedral Choir, as well as launching the Great Cathedral Organ series for Regent Records. In 2008 a major project was completed when the new Kenneth Tickell organ came into service in the quire of the Cathedral. His first recording on the new instrument included the Julius Reubke Sonata and Louis Vierne's First Symphony.

At the end of 2011 he left his cathedral post to start up his own recording company, Acclaim Productions. It is in this latter capacity that he has worked with David Briggs in the past, and this recording builds on that working relationship.

THE SACRED HEART CHURCH, WIMBLEDON

Constructed between 1886 and 1901, the Sacred Heart Church originally contained no space for a large organ or choir. With the arrival in 1904 of a charismatic choir director, Fr John Driscoll SJ, music came to play an important part in the life of the church. He set up his own Choir School and established a cathedral-style programme of music, and in 1912 a new gallery was installed at the west end, to house a choir of 50 men and boys and a substantial 3-manual organ. In the years between the Wars the choir acquired a national reputation, first coming to prominence in March 1923 when it sang with the choir of Westminster Cathedral in the liturgical première of RVW's *Mass in G minor* for double chorus. "We were particularly struck by the astonishing brilliancy of the unknown choir from Wimbledon", said *The Times*. "The boys' voices were singularly beautiful."

The organ was built by J.W. Walker & Sons in their characteristically grand Edwardian style, and designed on a lavish scale. By the early 1980s it was falling into disrepair, but a partial restoration by Mander Organs brought it back to life. In April 2010 the instrument was completely dismantled and Manders carried out a comprehensive restoration of all the bellows, mechanism and pipework, with the aid of a generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The inaugural recital was given by David Briggs in October 2011. "Situated", he said, "high in the gallery at the west end of this church (which feels more like a cathedral), the organ is one of the finest to have been handed down to us in virtually its original condition. The instrument hails from a particularly successful period in British Organ Building history and the heady combination of opulence and brilliance makes a vivid impact. The tubular pneumatic action has been painstakingly restored, thus respecting the original concept and also the manner in which this influences the player. This is a sensational instrument which deserves to be more widely known."

As an "original instrument", the organ is not equipped with the range of playing aids found on modern organ consoles; accordingly, the organist has to work a little harder, and sometimes needs assistance with rapid changes of registration. Some noise from the action is audible in the church and thus captured on the recording; this is part of the experience of enjoying the instrument.

THE ORGAN AT SACRED HEART CHURCH, WIMBLEDON

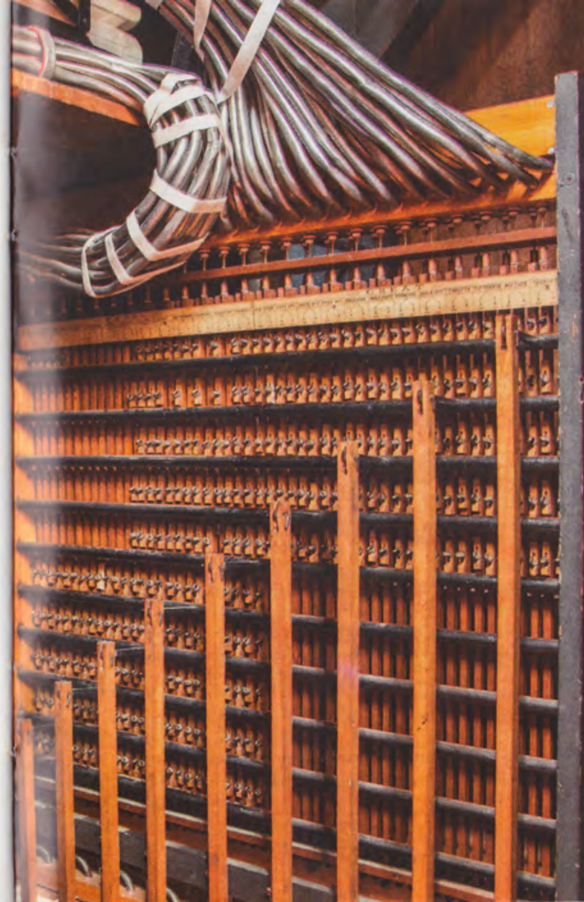
Specification

Great Organ
Double Open Diapason 16
Open Diapason No. one 8
Open Diapason No. two 8
Open Diapason No. three 8
Wald Flute 8
Dulciana 8
Principal 4
Harmonic Flute 4
Twelfth 2 2/3
Fifteenth 2
Mixture (15, 19, 22)
Trumpet 8

Choir Organ (Enclosed)
Contra Gamba 16
Lieblich Gedact 8
Gamba 8
Dulciana 8
Vox Angelica 8
Harmonic Flute 4
Piccolo 2
Clarinet 8
Orchestral Oboe 8
Tuba (unenclosed) 8
Tremulant

Swell Organ
Lieblich Bourdon 16
Open Diapason 8
Stopped Diapason 8
Echo Gamba 8
Voix Celeste 8
Principal 4
Flute 4
Dulciana Twelfth 2 2/3
Fifteenth 2
Mixture (15, 19, 22)
Contra Fagotto 16
Trumpet 8
Haut Boy 8
Vox Humana 8
Clarion 4
Tremulant

Pedal Organ
Double Open Diapason 32
Sub Bass 32
Open Diapason 16
Open Diapason Metal 16
Bourdon 16
Lieblich Bourdon 16
Gamba 16
Octave 8
Flute 8
Contra Trombone 32
Trombone 16
Fagotto 16
Trumpet 8



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PRODUCTION CREDITS

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Producer: Adrian Lucas
Assistant recording engineer: Richard Pugh

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