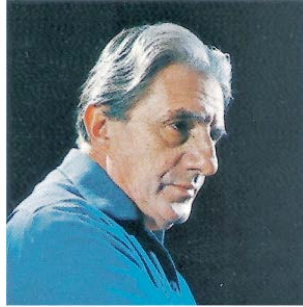


Sir John Barbirolli, CH (2 December 1899 – 29 July 1970), né Giovanni Battista Barbirolli, was a British conductor and cellist. He is remembered above all as conductor of the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, which he helped save from dissolution in 1943 and conducted for the rest of his life. Earlier in his career he was Arturo Toscanini's successor as music director of the New York Philharmonic, serving from 1936 to 1943. He was also chief conductor of the Houston Symphony from 1961 to 1967, and was a guest conductor of many other orchestras, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia, the Berlin Philharmonic and the Vienna Philharmonic, with all of which he made recordings.



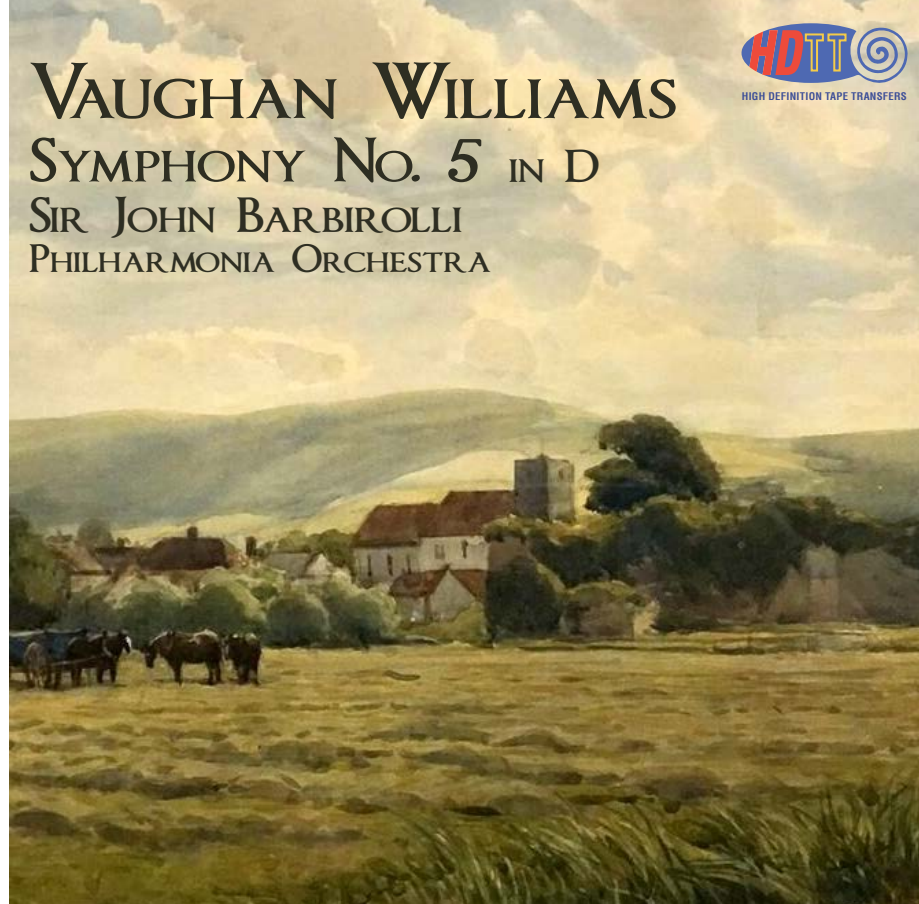
Born in London of Italian and French parentage, Barbirolli grew up in a family of professional musicians. After starting out as a cellist, he was given the chance to conduct, from 1926 with the British National Opera Company, and then with Covent Garden's touring company. On taking up the conductorship of the Hallé he had less opportunity to work in the opera house, but in the 1950s he conducted productions of works by Verdi, Wagner, Gluck, and Puccini at Covent Garden with such success that he was invited to become the company's permanent musical director, an invitation he declined. Late in his career he made several recordings of operas, of which his 1967 set of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* for EMI is probably the best known.

Both in the concert hall and on record, Barbirolli was particularly associated with the music of English composers such as Elgar, Delius and Vaughan Williams. His interpretations of other late romantic composers, such as Mahler and Sibelius, as well as of earlier classical composers, including Schubert, are also still admired.

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN D

SIR JOHN BARBIROLLI
PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA



During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Vaughan Williams was occupied with a wide variety of musical projects. His earliest film scores date from this time, such as those for *The 49th Parallel* (1940) and *Coastal Command* (1942). He also contributed to the war effort with works like the *Five Wartime Hymns* (1942) and the pageant *England's Pleasant Land* (1938); the latter work incorporates early sketches for the *Symphony No. 5*. There was also the ongoing labor on the opera/morality play *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Some incidental commissions also came his way, like the *Serenade to Music* written for Sir Henry Wood's golden jubilee as a conductor (1938).

And there was the *Symphony No. 5*, largely written over the years 1938 to 1943. Vaughan Williams himself conducted the London Philharmonic in the work's first performance at a Royal Albert Hall Promenade concert on June 24, 1943. A decade separates this symphony and its predecessor, and a work more unlike the violent and tumultuous *Symphony No. 4* would be hard to imagine. Vaughan Williams scholar Michael Kennedy has called the Fifth the "symphony of the celestial city," which perhaps gives some indication of the work's radiance and lyricism.

The *Symphony No. 5* was dedicated to Jean Sibelius, and the latter's own *Symphony No. 5* is evoked in the serene and mysterious opening *Preludio*. French horns sound out in D major over a low C in the strings, an ambiguity that is partly resolved when a radiant E major emerges in the strings. There are some darker moments during the more animated development section, but the opening horn calls return, and the main melody is heroically sounded out with brass and tympani. The epilogue is more ambivalent, wandering sadly toward a haunting and uncertain ending. The second

movement, *Scherzo*, is a sardonic little dance that emerges out of swirling strings. Blasts from the brass section occasionally interrupt the tune. As turbulent as the music gets, the scoring is light and nimble throughout. The music relaxes toward the end of the movement, perhaps in anticipation of what is to follow.

The *Symphony No. 5* derives some of its thematic content from the opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but only in the third movement "Romanza" is the connection between opera and symphony dramatically apparent. In the manuscript score, Vaughan Williams included a brief quotation from Bunyan's work: "Upon this place stood a cross, and a little below a sepulchre. Then he said: 'He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death.'" The movement begins mysteriously, as a stately chorale-like theme is presented. Woodwinds, particularly English horn and oboe, introduce a new theme (taken from Act One, Scene Two of the opera). The music becomes temporarily blustery, but the chorale theme returns and builds to a noble climax. A solo violin leads into the hushed and poignant coda. Like the Brahms *Symphony No. 4*, the Vaughan Williams Fifth ends with a *Passacaglia*; the stately theme is heard in the low strings at first, and is developed by the rest of the orchestra. Variations on the *passacaglia* theme range from the playful to the jubilant to the restive. A big, brass-laden climax leads to a return of the symphony's opening French horn call, this time in a more assertive guise. The strings reflect on motifs from the first movement, with the *passacaglia* theme lurking nearby, and fade into a very peaceful and beautiful ending to what some have called Vaughan Williams' greatest symphony.

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- 1 Preludio 11:02**
- 2 Scherzo 4:58**
- 3 Romanza 12:10**
- 4 Passacaglia 10:16**

Recorded by EMI 1963



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