

only as tuneful and energetic as any of the operetta overtures, but also shows that Sullivan was a masterful orchestrator for the full symphony as well as for the smaller pit group of *The Mikado* and its brethren.

By the time the *Overture di Ballo* was written and first performed in 1870, Sullivan was a mature composer who had already developed an identifiable style and who seemed well on his way to international fame. His first collaboration with W.S. Gilbert, *Thespis*, would follow a just a year later and would beckon him away from the writing of symphonic music.

This overture pulses with the popular dance rhythms of the day, but in its grace seems aimed at the ballet as much as at the ballroom. After an initial attention-getter comes a delicate Polonaise followed by the central waltz, marked *Tempo di Valse*. A contrasting *Tempo di Galop* section arrives to balance the gossamer with gusto.



Vaughan Williams SYMPHONY NO. 8

Sir Adrian Boult - The London Philharmonic Orchestra

SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN - OVERTURE DI BALLO

Sir Adrian Boult - New Symphony Orchestra of London



The shortest and probably the most lighthearted of his nine symphonies, Vaughan Williams' Symphony No. 8 was first performed on May 2, 1956, at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, by the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli, to whom the work is dedicated. Vaughan Williams was 83 years old at this point, and the variety and quality of his musical output showed no signs of flagging. Indeed, the composer was bringing new elements, new textures, and emotions into his work. A seemingly uncomplicated work, the Symphony No. 8 exhibits a slightly dark undercurrent, and an enigmatic quality that was made even more manifest in the Symphony No. 9 of the composer's final year, 1958.

The first movement of the Eighth is a Fantasia, subtitled "Variazioni senza tema" (Variations without a Theme). Vaughan Williams perhaps more accurately, described the movement as "Seven variations in search of a theme." It opens with one of the main elements of the movement, a querulous four-note phrase on which the flute elaborates, accompanied by glistening percussion. The music is restless, by turns stormy and lyrical. A jaunty, sardonic episode leads into the coda, in which flute, bassoon, and trumpet dance around the "theme," with harp and vibraphone providing a shimmering backdrop.

The woodwinds and brass are highlighted in the second movement, marked Scherzo alla marcia. It is a curious and slightly creepy march, with a more reflective, waltz-like central section,

calling Stravinsky to mind in the combinations of textures and the not-quite-serious attitude. The third movement, Cavatina, is for strings only, unfolding itself in a rich polyphonic fabric. It sounds superficially like the more familiar Vaughan Williams works for string orchestra (such as the Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis or The Lark Ascending), but here there is a slight pall of anxiety and restlessness over even the most mellifluous passages.

Much the same might be said of the final movement, Toccata, in which the orchestra is joined by five percussionists playing, as Vaughan Williams put it, "all the 'phones and 'spiels known to the composer." One can hear preliminary evidence of this interest in percussion instruments in the Christmas cantata *Hodie* (1948), and it is said that Vaughan Williams was inspired by a performance of Puccini's *Turandot* to include percussion in the finale of the Symphony No. 8. The percussion by no means dominates the texture, however, but supports the diverse goings-on in the rest of the orchestra. The movement is certainly extroverted, but once again there is a darker presence in the music. Perhaps the composer had it right when he called the Toccata "a rather sinister exordium." A grand and noisy climax brings the work to a close.

The only one of Sullivan's orchestral works to achieve any permanence in the standard repertoire, this delightful work is not

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Symphony No. 8 in D Minor 28:03

1 Fantasia (Variazioni senza tema) 11:05

2 Scherzo alla marcia (Per gli stromenti a vento) 3:54

3 Cavatina (Per gli stromenti a corde) 8:02

4 Toccata colle campanelle 5:02

5 **Overture Di Ballo** 10:41

Total Time: 38:44

Recorded by Mercury Records at the Eastman Theater at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY
on October 23 and October 24, 1959, using 3 Telefunken 201 microphones.

Engineer - C. Robert Fine & Robert Eberenz C. Robert Fine

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