

Heirs and Successors

Simon Coombs

In the Journal of October 2021, I wrote an article about some of the Society's members who were also composers. I invited other readers to get in touch and tell me of their successes and struggles as composers, and I am delighted to report that I am now able to introduce another group of potential heirs and successors to Ralph Vaughan Williams.

I begin with a loyal friend and supporter of the Society, **Penelope Thwaites** – she has been a member since 2007. Although born in the United Kingdom, Penny spent her early years in Australia until, after taking a degree in music from Melbourne University, she returned to Britain where she has been based ever since. She first came to the attention of many of us through her leading role in the Chandos Records series of the works of Percy Grainger, which numbered 21 CDs. She has consistently championed the music of other Australian composers, including Malcolm Williamson, Arthur Benjamin and Peggy Glanville-Hicks.

Although perhaps best known as a pianist, Penny has also been a composer for 50 years, beginning with a musical, *Ride! Ride!*, produced in the West End of London and around the world, and including songs, chamber music, piano and organ works and music for film and ballet. You can find plenty of these on CD, and I particularly recommend her *From Five Continents*, featuring Carolyn Sampson and James Gilchrist, on SOMM CD 0612. The Complete Grainger Edition is on Chandos 2019621 and *Ride! Ride!* is on SOMM CD 017. In August, SOMM released a CD of her chamber music, played by the Tippett Quartet, Benjamin Frith and the composer herself. The number is SOMMCD 0672 and it is well worth exploring: www://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penelope_Thwaites

Ian Assersohn has been a member of the Society since 2017, the year before he founded the Vaughan Williams Singers, which draws its members from the choirs who participate in the Leith Hill Musical Festival. After studying at the Royal College of Music, Ian embarked on a successful career as a choral conductor, teacher and grade examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. He has been composing, for most of his life, music which is enjoyable to sing. Take a look at both his website, via Apple Tree Music, and his Facebook page, for examples of his style and breadth of musical eloquence and you will hear what I mean. On

YouTube, you will find (among other things) his Pandemic gem, *The Rook Ascending* – Ralph would have enjoyed it without doubt. <https://www.appletreemusic.net/>

Paul Sarcich, a New Zealander by birth, developed his musical career in Australia, where he was successful in teaching, composing and performing as a percussionist. In 2000 he settled in Britain where he became a teacher at Morley College and worked for the now sadly defunct Cala Records. He joined the Society in 1995 and was awarded a PhD in composition by Goldsmith's College in 2013. He has composed a remarkably wide range of works, from solo works, small ensembles and vocal groups to orchestral works and opera. I recommend one of his *Songs of Light and Shade* which is on YouTube. Paul has long admired Vaughan Williams for his vision and his ability to write music for every occasion and for every kind of ensemble, and he aims to imitate that versatility. <http://www.paulsarcich.com/>

Rikky Rooksby lives in Oxford, where he lectures on literary and musical subjects, and teaches guitar. His 12-volume series on song writing has sold 350,000 copies. From 2002 he has composed music in a wide variety of genres, including four symphonies (a cycle of nine is planned), other works for orchestra, two string quartets and concertante pieces for various instruments and strings. One early piece – *A Chepstow Girl* (harp, solo violin and strings) – had four performances in Sussex and Gloucester. *Four Cornish Pictures* was performed by the St Albans Symphony Orchestra in 2006 and *Scenes from the Life of Sir Humphry Davy* was premiered in Penzance in 2010. *The High Oaks (Threnody)* is scored for the same arrangement of strings as the Tallis Fantasia. His style is tonal, melodic and lyrical: examples can be heard at <https://soundcloud.com>. He joined the Society in 2000 and has contributed to the Journal since then.

Another member who joined the Society in 2017 is the multi-dimensional **Len Rhodes**, now based in Colorado, but originally from the United Kingdom, where he studied at the Royal Academy of Music, the London College of Music and Morley College. He is a composer, arranger, pianist, organist, music director, educator and author. His music has been influenced by Bach, Beethoven and Debussy

among others, but his devotion to Vaughan Williams was evidenced last year by his *Meditation on Sine Nomine* for organ, a contribution to the 150th anniversary celebrations. Other works which reference Vaughan Williams include a piano solo transcription of 'Reconciliation' from *Dona Nobis Pacem* and an organ arrangement of *Pezzo Ostinato* from 1905, which is recorded on Albion ALBCD 053, *Serenade*. <https://lenrhodesmusic.com/>

Frederick Naftel came to our attention when he wrote to the Journal recently to make us aware of a work he had composed in 1985, *Aubade pastorale* for strings, a tribute to Ralph Vaughan Williams and the English pastoral school. A member of the Society since 2021, Frederick hails from Manchester, graduated from Manchester University and received a Fellowship in Composition from Trinity College of Music, London in 1980. He has written a wide variety of works and describes himself as an 'eclectic' composer. On YouTube you will find the *Aubade, Song of Songs, Rhapsody for strings and harp* and, in a different vein, *Concerto No 2 for orchestra*. Frederick takes inspiration from Vaughan Williams and says 'I firmly believe that music should be accessible to both performers and audiences and should express those emotions and feelings that characterise all aspects of humanity, whatever the subject matter.' You can read more on his website: www.fredericknaftel.com.

Finally, a retired composer is lurking in our midst! **David Aston** joined the Society in 2015 and became a trustee in 2022, taking over the role of Membership Officer. He studied composition at Dulwich College, and his *The Spherical Age of Time* was performed at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon – the instrumentation included a flexatone and water gongs and received mixed reviews! He completed 34 works, including three further pieces for large orchestra, two piano sonatas and a quartet for double basses. He decided to retire when he realised that the competition from Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle was just too strong. His music library contains more than 38,000 works – can anyone in the Society match that?

Readers can explore further through the websites of these composers. The Society is proud to have them as members. 🐦