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Cover drawing of Gerald Finzi by his wife Joy Finzi from *In That Place*,
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Finzi Friends was formed in 1982 to further interest in Gerald Finzi's life and work and bring together people with similar interests, to encourage and promote performances of Finzi's work and that of other British composers.

We publish an annual Journal and occasional Newsletters, containing articles relating to Gerald Finzi and other British Composers, reviews of CDs and books, and news regarding the organisation and some forthcoming performances of Finzi's works. We hold occasional workshops and study days, often organise a lunch and lecture at the Three Choirs Festival, and are involved in promoting the Ludlow Weekend of English Song.

www.finzifriends.org.uk

EDITORIAL

It has been a great pleasure to commission and edit this year's Finzi Journal, and to present it to you. I am particularly pleased that it has been possible to begin to fulfil one of my key aims, namely, to introduce to our ongoing literature about Finzi new contributors from 'the younger generation'. I know, from working with students and young professionals, not least at the Ludlow Song Weekend, that there is much enthusiasm for the music of Finzi amongst younger musicians, and for English Song. Younger musicians will, inevitably, hear and consider Finzi's music from a new and interesting perspective, informed by their exposure to the multitude of musical influences that social and other media provide. I am pleased that this year's journal enables such perspectives to be given an airing. The first of many such occasions, I trust.

Libby Burgess writes with great insight from her role as a pianist (let's lose the tag 'accompanist'!) about *Earth and Air and Rain*. She pays tribute to the scholarly work on which we all build, notably that of Diana McVeagh and Stephen Banfield, but sets out in a new direction to show what performing one of Finzi's most lasting achievements means to her and the responses that are evoked in doing so. The release this year of a stunning CD by Westminster Abbey Choir under James O'Donnell allows both mainstream choral repertoire by Finzi and some less often heard works be performed by some of this country's leading choral singers, and this is reviewed. Philip Lancaster's talk given on, as well as about, Chosen Hill at this year's joint event with the Gurney Society has been captured in print, with his post-event considerations added. The recent sad loss of one of Finzi's associates,

Jeremy Dale Roberts is marked by reminiscence from his former pupil, Richard Causton. It has been a pleasure, also, to offer my own thoughts about aspects of *Dies Natalis*, sparked by a performance I conducted earlier this year.

The journal also extends its focus outward, in line with the aims of Finzi Friends, to review some recent CDs of English Song and the very recent recording of Howells' clavichord music, played on the clavichord. For review of the latter, it has been very good to welcome aboard pianist Gavin Roberts, known to many of us from his performances at Ludlow Weekends.

One of this year's Ludlow young composers, Henry Page, writes engagingly about the songs of Jonathan Dove which Kitty Whately and Simon Lepper have recorded. I have been gratified to be able to bring to your attention a recent CD of the songs of Stephen Wilkinson, performed by a starry line up! And, sneaking in at the last minute, first reactions to the much-anticipated recording issued to celebrate the many wonderful years spent Celebrating English Song at Tardebigge. Mention of which leads me to thank Tardebigge's muse and guiding hand, Jennie McGregor-Smith for her work in preparing this journal for publication.

FINZI'S EARTH, AIR AND RAIN:
A PERFORMER'S VIEW

Libby Burgess

As I recently took my copy of *Earth and Air and Rain* off the shelf to revise it for a recital, I was struck by a number of things. Firstly, what a cracking section of my library the Finzi song category is! Secondly, how well-worn my copy is; it's wonderful to revisit music that one knows so well, and to see how it continues to evolve across a lifetime. (What a magical thing music is – that, for all we notate it in a fixed way, it continues to live and breathe, and only really exists in a moment.) Thirdly, what an amazing selection of poetry this set comprises: some of Hardy's best, which Finzi put together himself. And fourthly, as I started playing through it again, what a glorious piece of music this is, how beautifully it lies under the hands, how distinctively like Finzi it feels to play, and how evocative the harmonic language is. The meeting of minds between Hardy and Finzi is something special (albeit probably without meeting in physical terms. In the words of *To a Poet*: "Since I can never see your face, And never shake you by the hand, I send my soul through time and space To greet you. You will understand.") Whilst others can and have set these poems, it will take something to beat Finzi's understanding, and the music's synergy with Hardy's texts. Finzi wrote that 'if I had to be cut off from everything, [Hardy's *Collected Poems*] would be the one book I should choose'. He set over fifty of Hardy's poems and, a die-hard fan, even purchased Hardy's walking stick when the writer's belongings were sold after his death. Many others, better qualified and more knowledgeable, have written for this publication, so it would be foolish to

try to 'out-academicise' them. Instead, I'm going to explore this cycle from the performer's perspective: a whistle-stop tour of what I notice, and what the challenges are in this music.

Song is unique in its confluence of poem and music, and to me it is clear that the very best songs have both excellent poetry and excellent music, each of which illumines the other. Hardy's poems are not necessarily straightforward; in fact sometimes Finzi's settings make the texts more clear rather than less, which is unusual in a musical setting. As a song pianist, one of the fascinations for me is how we embrace, explore and express the text. For the singer, these are questions too, but perhaps the answers are more obvious; after all, they actually sing the words. A good composer writes a vocal line that fits the text, in rhythm, shape and mood; the singer, then, just has to sing it ('just'! With the perfectly formed vowels and consonants for the language concerned, with controlled breath, with a musician's understanding of the music and an actor's skill for conveying mood and meaning; I don't underestimate the job of the singer). In my opinion, the song pianist should spend every bit as long with the text – reading it, considering it, analysing it, interpreting it, internalising it. Without a clear sense of what the poem is about, we can't convey our thoughts coherently or meaningfully. For the pianist, there are a different set of decisions to make. Do we match the character's thoughts with the singer? Are we, in effect, the same character, experiencing the same love or loss or searching, as one? Or are we the scenery? The context? The description? Are we an answer to the singer's questions, almost an off-stage character, or the other half of an imagined dialogue or an internal tussle? Affirming their thoughts, or articulating those which cannot be put into words, or finding resolution where the poem doesn't provide it? The pianist is, of course, all of these things and more. In my experience, in Finzi's music, the pianist's role switches particularly quickly between these functions and it is this which makes the music so constantly fresh.

'Summer Schemes' is an upbeat opening to a relatively thoughtful cycle. Summer arrives, and calls the birds, who flood the land with their singing; the waters spring from little chinks and cascade down the hill, enhancing all the

green growth of the land. The piano writing is full of bubbling and cascading, all quavers and flurries. Immediately, Finzi sets up his irregular use of time signatures: after only two bars in triple time he shifts to quadruple, and then quickly back, thereafter constantly switching through the song. Often this shifting is to match the speech rhythms of the text; we don't speak in a fixed metre, and Finzi's text setting is almost entirely syllabic (I can't find a single melisma in this cycle), so the rhythm of the melodies follows a speech pattern. This changing time pattern also lends the music a fluidity: it never sits down, but stays afloat, moving at ease like the rivers and birds of the poem. Like many others in the cycle, I recently discovered I've tended to perform this song more slowly than the composer's marking suggests. It's easy to be seduced by the beauty of Finzi's music, by how delectable the harmonies are, and how regretful the thoughts often are. For English musicians in particular, there is a danger of wallowing in every little moment of beauty. Our continental colleagues, without the same English nostalgic associations, often bring a rigour to their performances of this music: a viola professor when I was studying at the Academy once pointed out that the most spectacularly scenic walk is ruined if you stop and hug every single tree along the way. Keeping the simplicity of the line flowing here means that when we get to "We'll go," I sing; but who shall say What may not chance before that day!', the composer's shift to minims and crotchets has more impact. The music more than halves in speed, creating a pause for contemplation over our powerlessness to control fate. Here the piano and voice parts are more closely locked together; our thought is as one.

One of the joys of playing these songs is the 'Finzi Echo' which litters the score: the piano echoes the singer's phrase, or the end of it, almost affirming the thought (or in some cases, perhaps questioning it). 'Who shall say What may not chance before that day!' is echoed by '...before that day....' in the piano, reiterating the thought, hovering for consideration, before verse two begins. Interestingly, this question is left unanswered, and the music remains in the minor key, whilst the equivalent at the end of verse two, 'but who may sing Of what another moon will bring!' settles on the major: an acceptance, perhaps, that while we can't control our future, we can enjoy

what we have today.

'When I set out for Lyonesse' sets up what looks like an assertive martial motif, but is marked *pp misterioso*; this is actually depicting wide-eyed youth and fairytale, rather than a heavy trudge, and again a sufficiently swift tempo is vital. Lyonesse is a country in Arthurian legend (notably in the story of Tristan and Iseult), said to border Cornwall. As a young apprentice architect, Hardy visited the St Juliot rectory and church in Cornwall for the first time, to supervise the restoration of a church, and here met his future wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford. On his return from the parish, people noticed a glow in his eyes (and, allegedly, a crumpled piece of paper sticking out of his coat pocket, containing the draft of this poem). Just as in the first song, here the melodic rise and fall is wide: an octave and a half span in less than three bars for the singer, with most phrases following a similar sweep. This lends the music a distinctive openness and optimism. It is hard, however, to carry off well: most singers will find either the top of the phrases a struggle or the bottom of the phrases hard to project well, and the diligent accompanist must always have ears alert to balance the same piano textures differently according to the range of the voice. The 'melting moment' as E minor gives way to E major could be written by no-one other than Finzi, the music more wistful as the voice notes 'what would bechance at Lyonesse ... No prophet durst declare'. Two magical modulations, from E to Eb, and then back to G major / E minor, show us the 'magic' in the eyes after this trip to Lyonesse.

'Waiting Both' captures beautifully the spaciousness of a starry night: the distance of the stars from earth portrayed in the wide range of piano writing, using everything from the depths of the bass range right up to the top octave but one of the keyboard. Rhythmically, there is a wonderful timelessness to this song, the piano gestures mostly placed across the barline, so we feel no clear beat. Time is somehow suspended as this strange little dialogue between star and human being takes place, each agreeing that the only thing they can do in life is 'Wait, and let Time go by.'

The first song from this cycle that I got to know well, 'The Phantom' is also one of the most obviously narrative of the set. It's always a challenge to

read poems in their 'original', free-standing form, without influencing the pacing through knowledge of a particular composer's musical setting, but I find that particularly to be true with this poem. I can't help thinking that it's because Finzi so wonderfully captured Hardy's shapes and moods here, that the two are somehow inextricable. From the outset Finziforeshadows the character we meet at the end of the poem ('a ghost-girl-rider': Hardy titled the poem 'The Phantom Horserider'), with wonderful galloping dotted rhythms and melodic sweeps. The first word, 'queer', interrupts the piano's introduction in an appropriately unexpected way:

Queer are the ways of a man I know:
He comes and stands
In a careworn craze,
And looks at the sands
And the seaward haze
With moveless hands
And face and gaze,
Then turns to go...
And what does he see when he gazes so?

Just as the language builds up in pace, almost breathless in this 'craze', so the music is 'hyped up', in tessitura and in relentlessness, until it stops, catching itself, at 'With moveless hands'; and with a shrug of the shoulders, *al tempo*, 'Then turns to go'. But the galloping motif slows, *ritenuto*, and instead of harmonizing the A natural with an F major chord, it's with F sharp minor, remote and searching, as we ask 'And what does he see when he gazes so?' Again the Finzi Echo in the piano writing - 'when he gazes so gazes so': we're lost in thought.

They say he sees as an instant thing
More clear than to-day,
A sweet soft scene
That once was in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring—
A phantom of his own figuring.

In a different key, a different time signature, and a different tempo, we're

transported to the different world which is the protagonist's dream-land.

Of this vision of his they might say more:

Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain-day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright-
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

Just as the character is sent crazy, unable to escape these images, so the motifs chime through the texture, inescapable, that echo employed here for a very particular effect: 'But everywhere' - 'everywhere' - 'everywhere'. The music pauses as we discover who the vision is, and then withers chromatically, before the music it conjours up hope of some kind of resurrection, we hear:

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

Following the drama of this large-scale song, the simplicity of 'So I have fared' is welcome. Hardy's subtitle 'after reading Psalms XXXIX, XL, etc.', and Finzi's note that 'This recitative should be sung with the flexibility and freedom of ordinary speech, and the crotchet should approximate to the reciting note of Anglican chant' leave us in no doubt that this is church music. The piano's sustained chords and simple harmonic progressions are reminiscent of plainchant accompaniment or a gentle chorale, with only small changes of pitch in the melodic writing, and the Latin phrases of this macaronic poem punctuate the cadential thoughts. This easy ritualistic writing is unsettled, however, in the last verse; the music changes, the harmony is more disturbed, the pacing new: 'And at dead of night I call:

“Though to prophets list I, Which hath understood at all? Yea: “*Quemelegisti?*” [whom did you choose?].’ Perhaps here, for composer and poet alike, we see an uneasy relationship with faith.

The rollicking ‘*Rollicum-Rorum*’ is the breath of fresh air and humour in the set. When each of an increasingly unlikely scenarios plays out (lawyers striving to heal a breach, parsons practising what they preach, justices holding equal scales, rogues only being found in jails, rich men finding their wealth a curse, filling therewith the poor man’s purse, and finally husbands with their wives agreeing and maids not wedding from modesty): ‘Then Boney he’ll come pouncing down, And march his men on London town!’ (i.e. so unlikely is it that Napoleon will invade London). The refrain ‘*Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lorum, Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay*’ taps into something anciently English: almost a ‘*fa-la-la-la*’. The staccato articulation and cheeky cross-rhythms give this song an energy unlike any other in the set, and the very fast metronome marking provides a challenge for even the best singers (“maids won’t wed for modesty” often trips people up at speed!). Furthermore, every verse enters at a different point in the piano interlude: a trap waiting to be fallen into!

‘*To Lizbie Browne*’ is my personal favourite of the cycle, a beautifully-paced, devastatingly simple tale of what might have been. (Finzi is reputed to have named it as one of the worst of the set, but I cannot agree!) Like so many Finzi melodies, this sweeps upwards, and then falters and falls. Always the first half is what might have been, and the second how it failed to materialise. Given the preponderance of tempo indications in much of Finzi’s writing, his footnote here is reassuring to the performer: ‘The beat should be flexible and wayward.... Such suppleness cannot, of course, be determined by directions on paper, and the modifications of speed which are given should only be considered as an outline.’ It’s so easy to get bogged down in trying to obey every marking a composer puts on paper, and important to remember that it’s most important that they are in the service of communicating text and mood, and as such need to be generated by the text and music, rather than being executed out of diligence!

The immediate question for performers in ‘*The Clock of the Years*’ is

whether or not the singer should speak the printed line "A spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up." This line, from the Biblical book of Job (4:15), is quoted by Hardy at the top of his poem, and by Finzi at the top of his song. To me, the rest of the song makes little sense without it, and so the singer should declaim it, setting up rush of demisemiquavers in the piano which launch 'And the Spirit said, "I can make the clock of the years go backward, But am loth to stop it where you will." Doing a deal with the devil, our character answers, "Agreed To that. Proceed: It's better than dead! ". Out of this recitative-style opening unfolds the tragedy of seeing the beloved's life played backwards, until 'she was nought at all.... It was as if She had never been. 'Scrunching through painful clashing sevenths and haunting piano echos (... 'never been' ... 'never been' ...) we are lulled into a horrid dream-like siciliana: can it really be happening? In a horror of unrelenting minor chords, in the depths of the piano's bass range, we hear it was our poor protagonist's own fault: 'It was your choice To mar the ordained.'

'In a Churchyard' is somehow easily forgotten in this cycle, but unjustly so. The poem in fact is one of the most strange and most philosophical, and the music matches it. Perhaps here, more than anywhere else in the set we hear the impact of Finzi's church music, descriptively moving from the creeping yew roots, buried underground, to the timeless long line of 'Each day-span's sum of hours', and to the bold fanfares of 'That no God trumpet us to rise We truly hope'. Every bit of imagery in the poem is matched with a musical texture and a harmonic colour. It is immaculately painted, and enormously satisfying to play.

The final song, 'Proud Songsters', is more about the piano than the voice (I realise I am heavily biased... but I think I'm right!). It feels in this way that it fits in a tradition derived from Schumann (and most obviously *Dichterliebe*, with its great summing-up piano postlude), of final songs being somehow handed over to the piano. A lengthy introduction, full of suspensions, added seconds, false relations, and with driving Finzi rhythms under the spun melodic lines, presents challenges to the pianist. With so many layers of texture, we have to work hard to 'orchestrate' the music, picking out the

different layers, to really show all the detail, without it feeling cluttered. The voice's entry, when it happens, is unexpected; just a comment on what has been heard from the piano:

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales in bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

And so the birds' chorus really takes off, the piano writing launching into an almost symphonic sweep, and then, through a twist of harmony with a crucial A natural taking us away from B minor towards D major, it starts to wind down. The rhythm stills, and the driving ceases. The point of the poem is in the second stanza and, really, the point of the cycle too. For both Hardy and Finzi, themes of the passing of time, the transience of life, and our role in a bigger universe, return time and again. *Earth and Air and Rain* was published in 1936, having taken several years before that to write, but was not premiered until 1945. Given the events of the intervening years, these themes must have been horribly poignant but also profoundly understood. So, framed musically with what is almost a chorale of peace and reconciliation, Finzi leaves us with the thought:

These are brand new birds of twelve months' growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales, nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

I always feel a real satisfaction if singer and pianist manage to generate a lengthy silence at the end of this song; we and the audience are lost in thought. Yet, somehow, the music here also feels that it could segue quite naturally into 'Summer Schemes', and we could begin the whole journey again. How cyclical life is, and how beautifully Finzi captures that in this piece.

TEXTURE AND TIMBRE IN DIES NATALIS

Martin Bussey

Consideration of texture and timbre in what is one of Gerald Finzi's most distinctive works, and arguably one of his most popular, cannot fail to take into account previous or contemporary works in a similar genre. One of the most immediately apparent as a similar work is Britten's *Les Illuminations*. Interestingly, though, this was composed at the end of the 1930s around the time that Finzi was completing *Dies Natalis*. It fared better than *Dies Natalis* in receiving its first performance in 1940, sung by the soprano, Sophie Wyss, whereas Finzi's work had to wait until after the war for its premiere in 1946. However, the genesis of *Dies Natalis* was a complex affair (outlined in Stephen Banfield's 1997 book on Finzi¹) so that it can be confidently understood that much of Finzi's work was composed well before Britten's. Interestingly, Banfield points out that Sophie Wyss was the original singer envisaged for *Dies Natalis*. (If mention of the soprano voice sparks confusion in relation to *Dies Natalis*, please read further!) There are, of course, significant dissimilarities with Britten's work aside from musical language. Britten chose the very much non-religious French poems of Arthur Rimbaud to set. Finzi's chosen text selects from the writings of the metaphysical English clergyman, Thomas Traherne. Britten's string writing seems deliberately to eschew the 'established' English string-writing tradition in favour of the more atmospheric, occasionally impressionist palette of continental composers.

To find the forerunners of *Dies Natalis* it is sensible to look in two places. Firstly, Finzi was in no way short of exemplars for string writing in the music

¹ Stephen Banfield: *Gerald Finzi* Faber and Faber 1997p. 250 et seq

of early twentieth century British composers. The list is extensive: Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*; Parry's *An English Suite* and similar works; Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*, etc; and Holst's *St Paul's Suite*. Interestingly, however, none of these composers chose to write a solo cantata of a similar nature to Finzi's work. The second place to look is, perhaps, the early eighteenth century.

Diana McVeagh² has promoted the idea that Finzi's exposure to Bach in 1926 can be linked to the style of 'The Salutation', the final movement of *Dies Natalis*, influencing also his use of the term 'Aria' at the head of the movement. In terms of texture, this would certainly be at one with the wider sense of contrapuntal writing (in its broadest, non-academic, sense – see Banfield³ for an account of Finzi's view of 'academic' counterpoint as studied under Bairstow) which characterises *Dies Natalis*. This is another significant link to preceding English string music, for example the fugal middle section of Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* and, in less serious mode, perhaps, Holst's *St Paul's Suite*. It also foreshadows Finzi's interest in the music of earlier, eighteenth century English composers which he was to promote, such as that by Mudge and Stanley. The solo vocal cantata was a staple of the early eighteenth century, composed for both secular and sacred occasions. (Few were fortunate to have texts of such depth and sophistication as those selected by Finzi from the writings of Thomas Traherne).

The significance of this textural decision to write in a linear style is not to be underestimated and it is a hallmark of the composer's style. Many of Finzi's contemporaries pursued a much more homophonic approach to writing, with emphasis on rich sonorities achieved by building up complex harmony, either by adding additional thirds to the basic triad or chromatic alteration of notes. Both devices are common, for example in the songs of John Ireland, to expressive effect, and the occasional consternation of pianists faced with fistfuls of added-note chords. (A good example occurs in the third verse of the ever-popular *Sea Fever*.) Finzi also frequently gives cause for pianists to practice at length but the challenge more often comes

² Diana McVeagh: *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* 2005 p.46

³ Banfield, pp 18-19

from grappling with combination within the two hands of independent lines of musical thought. The final song of *Earth and Air and Rain* is a good example. Even the apparently innocuous chordal writing of 'To Lizbie Browne' contains snatches of imitation within the piano accompaniment and, importantly, between the vocal line and the piano. An interesting parallel with the final movement of *Dies Natalis* can be found in 'When I set out for Lyonesse'. In the outer stanzas of this setting, Finzi places the voice in counterpoint to the melodic idea in the piano – interesting to ponder which came first, in fact. Finzi's inclination to write because he heard ideas in the text instinctively gives few clues here – it may just as easily have been the march-like tread of the accompaniment that sprang to mind first. Before leaving Finzi's approach to texture in songs with piano accompaniment it is instructive also to note the plentiful use of rests in his accompaniment figures. The 'space' that these create in the musical texture is directly akin to Finzi's technique in *Dies Natalis*. A good example is 'Two Lips' from *I Said To Love*. Constant quaver rests at the start of the righthand phrases in the piano set up that part's independence, notably contrasting with the way most vocal lines begin on a crotchet; and not always an upbeat crotchet – the second phrase of the song moves the voice's entry to the second beat of the bar. These details are typical of Finzi's subtle inflections, which have an impact on texture as well as on the rhythmic construction of Finzi's settings. In the rhythmic and textural freedoms Finzi achieved in his text setting, he jumped further away from the stylistic traits of preceding generations of English song writers than he is often given credit for.

In terms of timbre, *Dies Natalis* might prompt the unwary listener to expect little in the way of variety but this would be short-sighted indeed. The possibilities of a high solo voice with string orchestra are exploited to the full within the 'standard' techniques of Finzi's musical background. No 'extended' instrumental techniques here, but a thoughtful and often imaginatively responsive range of sounds to suit the text. This includes the possibilities to be exploited in the relationship between voice and strings. These pose a significant question about the work as a whole. The title page announces the work to be a 'Cantata for Soprano (or Tenor) Solo and

String Orchestra'. Yet the association of the work with the tenor voice is so strong that there is frequent surprise (apart from amongst aficionados!) when listeners learn that the first performance was given by that leading soprano of her day, Elsie Suddaby. The main point for consideration in any survey of Finzi's approach to texture and timbre is not 'who got there first' (a soprano, but the tenors have long wrestled the work to become theirs) but what difference either voice may make to the sound and texture of the work. The second movement 'Rhapsody' provides a clear picture of the potential differences. In many places it appears that the music is written with the soprano voice in mind so that, often, the first violin line moves at parallel pitch, for example during the passage 'I was entertained like an angel'. In several places this approach offers nuances which are very appealing. For example, after figure 3, the soprano voice sings 'Heaven and earth did sing' at exactly the same pitch as the first violin, but on the word 'sing' the violin ascends the interval of a fourth to add almost a halo to the word. Such touches are apparent when the solo voice is a tenor, of course, but the sense of close affinity between voice and the top line of the string orchestra cannot be replicated. Indeed, performing the work with a tenor creates several issues of balance not unlike those associated with cello concertos. The tenor voice inevitably sits in the middle of the string textures and at times wrestles for due prominence, particularly when double-stopping or divisi passages increase the density of sound in the octave extending upwards from G below middle C. None of these points is insoluble but such issues are significant factors to be considered in any performance of the work. At times, of course, the use of tenor soloist adds to the sound world immeasurably. The opening of 'The Salutation' creates a 'mellow' timbre by throwing much emphasis on the sound of the viola in its lowest register. The violins imitate, and take the music to a climax in the middle of the movement, but in the outer sections, the movement belongs to the viola, as is evident when its melody closes the entire work. This pitch sits directly parallel with the range of the tenor voice, so that a lasting aural memory is of a duet-like sound between tenor and viola. The sound world created by a soprano voice, sitting high above the accompaniment for most of the movement is a very different one, though

appealing and equally affecting.

For the most part, contrasts of texture within the work are created through Finzi's imaginative and skilful writing for strings. It is here that the techniques inherent in works by his predecessors are capitalised upon and presented afresh at the service of Traherne's imagery. Discussion of the opening instrumental movement is reserved to the end of this article so that immediate focus remains on Finzi's textural use of both voice and strings.

The extended 'Rhapsody' is a compendium of string-writing techniques which would be demeaned by simply making a list. The point is that each technique fits its text like a glove. An example is the very end of the movement where a string quartet-like texture is ideally suited to the mood, allowing space for thought in its simplicity, heightened by the absence of the double bass. (Finzi's use of the double bass throughout the work deserves an article of its own as he employs the '16 foot' option, as organists would recognise it, with unerring skill and economy (possibly because he wasn't an organist). The texture here fittingly matches the tonal uncertainty with which the movement ends, an unresolved A minor, in relation to the movement's overall tonal centre of G. The climax of the movement, 'I saw all', is heightened by rich *divisi* writing, tonally securely based on a drone between double bass and second cello. The rising, tremolo scales in sixths between violas and first cellos are consistent with a textural idea which recurs in the movement. It is particularly telling as an accompaniment to 'strange and wonderful things'. The sixth, perhaps the archetypal consonant interval (think Donizetti) is tellingly employed to create the atmosphere of sweetness, but within a harmonic background which is by no means clichéd. Similarly, Finzi frequently doubles musical lines instruments an octave apart. Probably one of the most telling and memorable moments in the movement is the series of static chords on the words 'The corn was orient and immortal wheat', surely one of Traherne's most enduring images that Finzi chose to set (see Diana McVeagh⁴ for detail on Finzi's being 'composer enough to be ruthless' in his selective treatment of Traherne's text). Here the spacing is worthy of the opening of Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia*, and any aural

⁴ McVeagh p.43

link it creates is surely a beneficial one in terms of mood. Strangely, this is none of the few truly recitative-like moments in this extended movement, in the usual sense of the term. There's little obvious recitative in terms of giving metrical licence to the singer, although rhythmic flexibility is paramount in any performance. Overall, the movement has melodic and rhythmic drive for the most part, which links the sometimes disparate and often challenging text, in terms of comprehension. Repetition of the types of texture described above adds much to the coherence of this extended movement.

The 'danza' in the next movement, as Finzi describes 'The Rapture', owes much to the exuberance of the opening string trills, although these disappear fairly quickly (a pity, in some ways) with just a backward glance given to them at the close of the movement. They are, perhaps, unusually extrovert for Finzi? The potential weight of the exuberance at the beginning is offset by constant use of divisi pizzicato chords in the lower strings to accompany the melodic upper parts, which now frequently move in thirds, as opposed to the sixths of the previous movement. The pizzicato chords, though heavy-looking on the page, create a highly unusual sound world in the way they move rapidly across different octaves. This is perhaps one of the most individual moments in terms of timbre in the whole work. In some ways, the middle section is less original in its texture, although beautiful in its solo melody. The repeated accompaniment quavers maintain momentum, but one is always glad to have return of the pizzicato idea.

Movement four, 'Wonder' offers the most complex textures of the work. Headed 'Arioso', the structural flexibility this implies is put to excellent use to respond to some of the most reflective lines Finzi selected from Traherne. The recurrence of the word 'how' pinpoints this reflective quality. For example, the couplet:

The Skies, in their Magnificence, the lovely lively air,
Oh, how divine, how soft, how sweet, how fair!

The absence of any 'action', even though the words are spoken directly by the central child-figure, could render this problematic to set. Finzi responds intuitively to the meditative possibilities of the images. Partly, these images are reflected through simple contrasts, such as between the

rich textures to support the singer at the words 'So rich and great' and the thinning out at the quieter passage 'A native health'. Technically, though, these contrasts bear closer scrutiny. The emphasis on combining individual lines within the string orchestra is amplified by dividing each group, with the exception of the double bass line. Finzi's instinctive practicality is to the fore here: the undivided double bass line indicates the clear possibility of performing the work with one player to each part if larger forces are not available. This would involve ten players. The necessity of the tenth results from Finzi adding to the *divisi* demands by requiring a solo first violin line (as well as other short solo passages). This strategy inevitably leads to consideration of what is the optimum number of players. This author has very successfully performed the work with ten players. The individual lines appear very clearly aurally although inevitably, at points in the score, at the cost of weight, particularly in the lower parts. Larger forces will supply greater weight but this also begins to pose challenges of balance and clarity. There is little doubt that the string orchestra envisaged is of the 'chamber' variety. The passages in thirds and sixths (and octaves) employed earlier in the work recur in this movement and their position spread across the string group means that clarity is essential. The passage 'The Stars did entertain my Sense' illustrates this well. Over-played, these lines will become stodgy as they interweave with accompanying lines.

The fact that Finzi rarely employs block chords, but keeps all the parts fluid and melodic adds much to the beauty of the whole work, and particularly this movement, but demands a fine ear from conductor and players alike to discern relative significance and how best to communicate this. The opening of 'Wonder' illustrates another aspect of this approach, which recurs throughout the work, imitative writing. In the hands of a weak composer this can be wearisome, as motifs are 'copied' from part to part. Finzi's skill lies in making imitation entirely natural and the essential fabric of the writing. At the opening, an upward motif containing small intervallic leaps, not always presented identically in melodic terms, occurs in every half bar, presented by each instrument in turn. The masterstroke is that the voice, when it enters on the words 'How like an Angel came I down!' presents a

descending phrase, rhythmically slower and conjunct in melody. The strings are the backdrop to this musical idea, not an illustration, and the backdrop is woven of the upwardly driving phrase (a distant relative of 'Lizbie Browne', it has to be noted). Yet the descending idea has already been heard, as the ending of the upward phrase and, crucially, presented in the first bar in the violas' line, as counterpoint to the upward phrase in the first violins. Finzi's other, melodic master-stroke, is the modal inflexion he gives the descending idea when the voice presents it. Such techniques ensure an integrity and coherence in Finzi's writing which underpins the whole movement. The more obvious 'richness' at phrases such as the one to accompany 'I within did flow With Seas of Life like Wine' rely on such secure technique for their effect. They are every bit the equal of Elgar's string-writing in the *Introduction and Allegro* in terms of technical awareness and good judgement.

Several features of the final movement, 'The Salutation', have already been discussed. The term not yet proposed is 'chorale prelude', as remarked also by Diana McVeagh⁵. The accompaniment figures in the strings provoke comparison with Bach's approach to the contrapuntal interweaving that surrounds the melody in Bach's works in this style. This is emphasised in the steady crotchet tread that characterises the bass line. As with Bach's chorale preludes, the string music is capable of existing in its own right, although it is immeasurably transformed once the vocal line is added. The vocal line acts, though, as a pendant to the other music. Phrase structures frequently overlap between voice and strings, to emphasise their independence.

Consideration of the opening movement of the work, where the voice is absent, is inevitably skewed by the recognition that it is, indeed, an introduction, hence the title, 'Intrada'. It is much more than this, having integrity as a string piece in its own right. The composer acknowledged this by including a conclusion for occasions when the movement is performed alone. If this ending is not used, the tonal structure of the movement is interesting. Like 'Rhapsody', the music ends, when acting as a prelude to the rest of the work, in a minor. In this context, this key is still further distant from the opening, which has a tonal centre of G, than is the case in

5 McVeagh p.46

'Rhapsody'. In terms of texture and timbre, the movement is conservative when compared with some later passages in the cantata. On the page, the score is reminiscent of the style of Elgar's early *Serenade* for strings in terms of texture, as remarked also by Stephen Banfield⁶. The complexities of later movements are seldom approached, even in the mini-climax engineered after rehearsal number 10. Many later devices are presaged, including after figure 8 the crotchet bass tread of 'The Salutation'. In terms of timbre, the use of violins in their lowest register is notable, creating the warmth often associated with the composer. Significant, too, is the way in which passages apparently textured as 'melody and accompaniment' to the innocent ear, such as after figure 2, are in fact constructed of a series of descending scalic figures in all parts, carefully interlocking and commencing at different times. These form the counterpart to the rising figure which opens the whole work, imitative treatment of which forms the music logic of the movement's conclusion from figure 12.

In terms of musical language, considering melody and harmony, many would charge Finzi's style with being conservative for a piece composed in the late 1930s. In terms of texture and timbre it is both inventive, and also effective in renewing existing traditions of string writing. When combined with Finzi's unsurpassed sensitivity to text and instinctive vocal responsiveness, these elements create a highly expressive and intense work which can be justifiably termed unique.

6 Banfield p.250 et seq

BAEDEKERS AND BENEDICTIONS: FINDING GURNEY

Philip Lancaster

This article is based upon a talk given at a joint meeting of Finzi Friends and the Ivor Gurney Society, at St. Bartholomew's Church, Chosen Hill, Churchdown, on 3rd June 2017.

Who is Ivor Gurney? — as an artist? Have we understood him? Indeed, how do we find and understand any creative artist? When can we say that we truly know who they are, what it was to which they were aspiring, and what drove and defined them and their art?

The perception of art is a subjective thing. We bring to it our own experiences and ideas; our own ways of reading, listening and looking. It has been said that there are as many versions of the truth of work as there are numbers of people who encounter it. But there are truths about an artist to which we might attempt to get close in our absorption and exploration of their work. To know, however, we must first be *exposed* to their work. But how do we get to find these works and get to know them? And how much of their work do we need to know in order to glean some essence of that truth?

The journey of a work begins with the artist. It is they who first endeavour to get their work out to an audience. As they send it out into the world, and as they talk to those who are performing, publishing, curating, or taking in that work, they may be able, in some small degree, to shape the perception of it, and of themselves. They are able to promote their work by actively seeking publishers or performers. In the case of Gerald Finzi, although his life was cut short in 1956, he was still able to spend three decades nurturing an audience for his work through active engagement with performers, promoters and

commissioners, establishing his presence in the short to medium term. He was also fortuitous in finding a dedicated publisher for his works, Boosey & Hawkes. Following his death, his publisher continued to keep his work alive, keeping his music in print and in active promotion, whilst friends and family, most notably his wife, Joy, maintained the personal momentum that had been built up by Gerald. Importantly, Joy founded the Finzi Trust in 1969 to continue this work. The Trust, in collaboration with Boosey & Hawkes, has seen his work securely into this century, establishing it in the musical canon for the long term. More interestingly and importantly, perhaps, the Trust has not only overseen the secure promotion of just his music: it has also sought to perpetuate some of the Finzis' broader values and ideas in encouraging other artists. Finzi Friends, as a daughter but independent organisation, has assisted with this, as well as allowing all those who admire Finzi's work to come together under a mutual banner which maintains a lively and social interest in the Finzis and their work. Finzi has been fortunate indeed.

Where Finzi was able to spend those three decades in establishing himself personally amongst performers, publishers and promoters, Gurney had little more than three years in which to do so before he was cut off from the world. The biographical concerns of his life, from his discharge from active service in the First World War, in October 1918, to his incarceration in an asylum in 1922, left a too short time in which to be able to establish himself fully in the fraternities of poets and musicians. In that short time he did in fact make some remarkable progress: several songs and some piano works were published; and his songs began to be taken up by performers. However, upon his incarceration, this fell away. The stigma attached to the asylum was such that he was as good as dead. Indeed, in a letter to Vera Somerfield of 22 January 1923, Gerald Finzi wrote of, 'the most terrible news I have had for five years. Ivor Gurney has gone mad. He is quite unrecognised now, but in 50 years' time his songs will have replaced Schubert's. In his line, Gurney is supreme. I always said he [wouldn't] live long – his work was



such a consummation — & now he is in all but name, dead'.¹ Although only confined in a hospital, Gurney was lost; his place in society and his standing as an active artist gone. His works received a little further attention, with the publication of his two Carnegie award winning song cycles, the first, *Ludlow & Teme* (1923) even being broadcast on the radio in 1925; and Jack Squire published a few new poems in his literary journal, *The London Mercury*, in 1933-34, in an attempt to resurrect Gurney's name and fortunes. But Gurney was otherwise almost entirely overlooked and forgotten.

Not only this, but he was powerless to effect any interest in his work. He wrote many appeals for release, and asking that his music be performed and his poetry published, but to no avail. During the first five years of his incarceration he continued to write prolifically, although only a very small handful of the hundreds of poems and musical works made it out into the world.

Gurney should perhaps have sunk without a trace. With his two published poetry collections of 1917 and 1919, and his published songs and piano works, he may have been a notable footnote in the history of English poetry and music, as is W. Denis Browne. Where Finzi's work blossomed under the aegis of his own networking, being able to build and promote an increasing body of performed and published work, Gurney's reputation has been borne by a trickle of acolytes; individual followers who keep the flame

¹ Quoted in Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), pp.31-32.

alive and seek to do what they can to keep his name and work in the public sphere. Indeed, it is only through the agency of these acolytes that Gurney's work has even survived, preserved from being lost or destroyed.

The first of Gurney's acolytes was the one who bore his flame, and the burden of his art and life, from his first formal footings as a creative artist: Marion Scott. She and Gurney met at the Royal College of Music in 1912, and it was through her encouragement that Gurney began writing poetry in earnest in 1915, serving his apprenticeship as a poet during the war. Scott oversaw the publication of these first poems, notably collating, and seeing from proposal to press, his first collections, *Severn and Somme* and *War's Embers*. In the wake of Gurney's incarceration, Scott resumed her ministrations, looking after both Gurney's personal care and his business affairs. She was his connection with the outside world, overseeing the publication of the few works that did make it out. Her most notable act, however, as far as posterity is concerned, was in preserving the thousands of manuscripts produced by Gurney. She retained all of his papers, and asked that all of his work from the asylum be passed to her. Furthermore, towards the end of his life she advertised and asked Gurney's friends and acquaintances whether they held any manuscripts, in order to preserve his work as a single collection.

Here it is that Gurney's second acolyte enters the scene: Gerald Finzi, and, through him, his wife, Joy. Finzi discovered Gurney's work in 1920, taking the newly published *Elizabethan Songs* to his lesson with Edward Bairstow in York, where Elsie Suddaby, at Bairstow's for a singing lesson, sang 'Sleep'. It was Finzi's 'Damascus' moment; his realisation of the true power and intensity that could be achieved in song. The influence of Gurney on Finzi's own work has not yet been examined fully, but bore fruit in two songs of 1925, 'Only the Wanderer' (published posthumously in the set *Oh Fair to See*) and 'Carol', which was reworked into one of the movements of the *Bagatelles* for clarinet and piano. *Let us Garlands Bring* (1942) may also have been influenced, in the nature of the set, and perhaps more deeply, by those *Five Elizabethan Songs* of Gurney. It was no accident that Finzi lived for a short time on Chosen Hill and in Painswick; places beloved of Gurney,

amongst others, and a locality that bore and inspired many significant musicians and poets in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Finzi wrote to Marion Scott in early 1925, asking whether a new collection of songs might be prepared. In July and August of that year, a new set of Edward Thomas songs, *Lights Out*, was brought together. Finzi was amongst those who contributed financially to its publication by subscription by Stainer & Bell in 1926. At this same time in 1925 Finzi also assisted with the preparation of the scores for the 1926 Carnegie Trust publication of *The Western Playland*. However, Finzi's role as one of Gurney's key acolytes came in 1937, the final year of Gurney's life. One of the main impetuses behind Scott's call for material from Gurney's friends and acquaintances was the undertaking by Finzi, with the help of Joy Finzi and Howard Ferguson, and occasional advice from Vaughan Williams, of the cataloguing of Gurney's music manuscripts. As part of this, Finzi and Ferguson proffered a rough grading of the quality of the music: two ticks for very good; one tick for good; a tick and a cross for 'moderate to bad'; and a cross for bad. He wrote that their system of grading 'must seem very ridiculous – like a Baedeker [sic] Guide!!'²

In parallel with the cataloguing, Finzi was arranging for the publication of twenty of Gurney's songs by the Oxford University Press (OUP), which Finzi himself transcribed and prepared from the manuscript, ready for engraving. Further volumes of 10 songs appeared due to Finzi's efforts in 1952 and 1958, the latter volume undertaken following Finzi's death by Howard Ferguson and Finzi's son, Kiffer. In order to flag up the new song publications, Finzi was pushing Scott to arrange for a few articles on Gurney and his work to be published in OUP's journal *Music and Letters*, to coincide with the publication of the twenty songs in 1938. In devising the range of articles Finzi observed in a letter to John Haines that '*names* are what are needed for drawing attention'³, i.e. established poets and composers whose name would lend weight to, and in turn qualify the merit of, Gurney's work.

2 Letter from Finzi to Marion Scott, 30 January 1937.

3 Letter from Finzi to Haines, 17 March 1937.

Finzi emphasised the balance of articles required to lift Gurney's work out of anonymity. Some would proffer a 'Benediction': a laying on of hands; a seal of merit and blessing from a well-known figure. Others would balance this with a more discursive article. For the music, Vaughan Williams had offered such a 'Benediction', whilst Howells was suggested as the writer of an article on the songs. In respect of the poetry, Walter de la Mare gave the Benediction while Squire provided the greater substance. Although Gurney saw the proofs of the symposium, intended as a living tribute, when it was published in the January 1938 issue of *Music and Letters*, it had become a posthumous tribute, issued just days after his death on Boxing Day 1937.

Despite Finzi and Gurney living in Gloucestershire concurrently for a short time, and their attending the same concert at a British Music Society congress in London in May 1920, the two composers were never to meet. A meeting was planned, through their mutual friend Herbert Howells, in 1935, a mutual meeting of composers, but the tragic loss of Howells' son, Michael, intervened, and no further opportunity for that meeting arose.

The Finzis' work on Gurney's behalf was not limited to his music. They persuaded Edmund Blunden to prepare a first selection of Gurney's poetry for publication. With Blunden being so busy, he only managed to get round to the edition in May 1951, when the Finzis locked him in a room with Gurney's poetry at their home in Ashmansworth. Blunden trawled through the many typescripts of the poetry that had been made across the years by Marion Scott and her typist, and by a tame typist known to the Vaughan Williamses, and brought together a collection that was published in 1954. This was the first major collection of Gurney's poetry to be published since his second collection, *War's Embers*, in 1919.

On Christmas eve in 1953 Marion Scott died. She bequeathed to Finzi the debt of monies incurred by her in the course of Gurney's care and work. For 16 years she had held Gurney's manuscripts as collateral against this debt. In so doing, Scott ensured the preservation of Gurney's work by keeping the manuscripts from Gurney's brother, Ronald. Ronald did not understand Gurney and his work, nor the efforts that others were making on his behalf, and were the manuscripts to come into his hands it was probable that he

would destroy them. With the transfer of that debt, and the manuscripts, to the Finzis, perversely Ronald determined to pay the debt and reclaim the manuscripts for the family. A few years after Gerald Finzi's death in 1956, Ronald acceded to pressure brought upon him by the Finzis and Vaughan Williams, and deposited the collection on permanent loan with Gloucester Public Library, since transferred to what is now Gloucestershire Archives. This ensured the survival of Gurney's work for the long term.

There is, sadly, a shadow side to this wrangling with the manuscript collection, which is painful to say and painful to hear: Joy destroyed a large number of manuscripts. There is a note in the Gurney Archive written by her two years after Gerald's death: 'All the contents of this box were sorted from a vast collection of miscellaneous material and appeals for help – most of which followed a pattern of incoherence – the main mass of which has been destroyed. Joyce Finzi Ashmansworth. October 1958.' Gerald, I am sure, would not have sanctioned such a destruction. While she makes mention of appeals and 'miscellaneous material', it is significant that a large number of music manuscripts also went missing in the midst of these wranglings. The major part of these missing musical works is the contents of a page of Finzi's catalogue listing 26 predominantly chamber works of 1924–26, but also including a symphony. At the head of that page in the catalogue is written by Finzi, 'Everything on this page is useless'.⁴

Finzi admitted in a letter written to Marion Scott following the first cataloguing session in January 1937 that;

The sorting has been even more difficult than I expected, chiefly because there is comparatively little that one can be really sure is bad. Even the late 1925 asylum songs, though they get more and more involved (and at the same time more disintegrated, if you know what I mean) have a curious coherence about them somewhere, which makes it difficult to know when they really are over the border.⁵

If these numerous late instrumental works were destroyed, as seems most likely, it was undoubtedly an act that sought to ensure that only the best of Gurney's work was preserved, so as not to compromise his reputation by the bringing out of 'useless' works.

⁴ Finzi: Catalogue of Ivor Gurney's M.S.S. roughly sorted, List III (March 1937). Gurney Archive.

Upon the deposition of the Gurney papers in Gloucester Public Library, a third significant acolyte enters the scene: the Forest of Dean poet, Leonard Clark. Clark had attended Gurney's funeral at Twigworth on 31 December 1937, and shortly thereafter wrote a poem 'In memoriam Ivor Gurney'; a poem recently set to music by Ian Venables in his song cycle *The Pine Boughs Past Music* (2010). Clark spent many hours in the library working with the papers, and in 1963 prepared a substantial new collection of Gurney's poetry, drawing not only upon the typescripts but also the many unpublished manuscripts. However, Ronald Gurney stamped on the publication and would not, as copyright holder, give permission for the use of the poetry. Ronald's obstruction continued to the end, and permission from the family to publish Clark's collection was only given following Ronald's death in 1971. It finally appeared ten years after its making, in 1973, published by Chatto and Windus. The final publication of Clark's selection contained significant cuts, with only around a half of the poems in Clark's typescript making it to the final book. Even now, much of that other half remains unpublished.

The death of the obstructive Ronald, and the release of Clark's collection, gave rise to a new momentum to the efforts to bring Gurney's work to a wider public, through a series of new acolytes. In 1978, Oxford University Press published the first biography of Gurney, written by Michael Hurd, who a year later also prepared a fifth volume of ten songs for OUP. This was followed in 1982 by a major new collection of Gurney's poetry, again published by OUP, edited by the late P. J. Kavanagh. He was assisted greatly by Kate Kavanagh, his wife, who undertook a significant survey of the poetry in the archive. Kelsey Thornton brought the first collection of Gurney's correspondence to publication in 1983, *War Letters*, followed by the *Collected Letters* in 1991. A new edition by Thornton of Gurney's first poetry collections followed, and thence editions of three previously unpublished collections. One of these volumes was co-edited with George Walter, who in turn edited and published Gurney's third intended collection, rejected by his publisher in 1923, *80 Poems or So*.⁵ Between them, Thornton and Walter

⁵ Thornton's and Walter's editions, of both letters and poetry, were published by Carcanet Press in association with the Mid Northumberland Arts Group.

are responsible for bringing some hundreds of poems to public attention for the first time. In 1986, Anthony Boden published a more intimate collection, *Stars in a Dark Night*. As well as the work on the poetry and letters, Richard Carder was exploring the music, seeking to bring new works to life out of the archive.

A significant moment came in 1995 with the realisation of Anthony Boden's vision for an Ivor Gurney Society; an important focal point for the social appreciation and encouragement of interest in Gurney and his works. Boden also took on, formalised, and made active the Ivor Gurney Trust. Boden, the Trust, and the Society, have played a key role in bringing about and supporting new recordings of Gurney's works, a critical thing in the modern reception of any composer.

Gurney could have been lost to us, being that small footnote in the annals of British poetry and music. However, through this procession of acolytes, his work has largely survived the precariousnesses of time and obstruction. The knowledge and reception of Gurney has now gathered such momentum as to ensure that his work will survive and be known by future generations. It is only through the work of this handful of acolytes, carrying Gurney's work across the years, that biographies and studies by Pamela Blevins (2008), Eleanor Rawling (2010) and Kate Kennedy (2018) have been made possible. It is a great privilege for me to follow humbly in this line of esteemed acolytes, and to have worked, and be working, alongside Ian Venables (who has taken on Anthony Boden's mantle in the Society and Trust) and Tim Kendall on bringing some substantial portions of Gurney's output into the public arena, much of it for the first time.

This history of the carriage of Gurney's work across three quarters or so of a century is all well and good, but what about that opening question: Do we know who Gurney is? To echo the inevitable question from the back seat of the car, 'Are we there yet?' Do we know the nature of his art and the motivations and aspirations that he sought in his work?

The short answer is No: we are not yet there. During the last 30 years, poetically, and 10, musically, we have opened many more windows onto his work; but there are many corners of the room on which we are only just

shedding light. With the coming publication of the complete poetry by OUP, which I am editing with Tim Kendall, it will be possible, for the first time, to assess this key arm of his output *in full* for the first time, warts and all. A radical and revelatory opening up of his work. Musically, we are in a better position than ever before, with the breadth of the recorded catalogue which now takes in orchestral, choral and chamber work; but there is still work to be done. Once the work has found its way out into the world, through publication, performance or recording, it takes time for the work to settle; to be absorbed and assessed. Which pieces of his work will live and perhaps find a place in the fickle Literary and Musical Canons? This is a question of chance and opportunity.

But getting the work out into the public arena is only one part of the process. There is a need, particularly with Gurney, to reassess the received knowledge and history of the man and his work; to refresh the expectations of what it is that Gurney *is*; to inform performers and readers and listeners so that they might meet Gurney on his own terms. The reception of Gurney's work has been blighted absolutely by his biography. That most media-worthy, sensational aspect of his life, that he 'went mad', has coloured much of what we think about his work. The perception of madness and the stigma of the asylum has led to the censorship of both his music and poetry. It has given birth to myths about Gurney which often have little foundation. The seed of some of these were planted early on. For instance, in the January 1938 *Music and Letters* symposium, Herbert Howells contributed an article on Gurney's music in which he wrote of his early work and experience:

'Gurney went to London in 1911, his wallet bulging with works of many kinds. There were piano preludes thick with untamed chords; violin works strewn with ecstatic crises; organ works which he tried out in the midst of Gloucester's imperturbable Norman Pillars. There was, too, an essay for orchestra that strained a chaotic technique to breaking-point. In 1911 he had enthusiasm enough to write anything.'⁶

I have huge respect for Howells, but I can't help but hear in this the retrospective layering and confusion of the man and music. Howells, writing in 1937, is looking through the lens of hindsight; a lens of breakdowns and of

6 Herbert Howells, 'Ivor Gurney: The Musician', *Music and Letters*, vol. XIX, no.1 (January 1938), p.13.

the struggles with which Gurney had to do battle. But here, in Howells' words, are the beginnings of a great Gurneyan Myth: the untamed chaos of Gurney, of his music, and of his scores. This is a myth that has marred the perception of Gurney. From the manuscript evidence, Howells' assertions cannot be substantiated. The only orchestral essay up to this point, a *Coronation March* (1910-11), is highly Elgarian, but there is nothing either chaotic or technically deficient in it; the 'untamed chords' (whatever that might mean) are not in evidence; and the 1910-11 violin works seem to be devoid of 'ecstatic crises'. What might be more true is that, in Howells' opinion, Gurney was lacking the refinement and elegant finesse which we associate with Howells' own art. Formally, Gurney's works are certainly more fluid in nature, and not as structurally tight as Howells would undoubtedly have prepared and preferred, but there is still form. In short, Gurney was Gurney; he was not Howells.

This label of 'chaos' in relation to Gurney's scores has persisted to a remarkable degree. A reviewer of a recent CD recording of Gurney's *A Gloucestershire Rhapsody* wrote of that work having 'long [been] thought to be unplayable owing to the apparently incomplete state in which the music survived.'⁷ That reviewer, and indeed the writer of the sleeve note, lays at mine and Ian Venables's feet the accolade of having 'reconstructed' the score. This simply isn't true. Gurney's score was complete and coherent. It had merely been ignored for ninety years. The same has been said of the *War Elegy* for orchestra, which Ian and I edited for recording in 2006. There were unusual brass transpositions to be dealt with and some correcting of obvious mistakes; and a couple of bars had to be completed, where Gurney had turned a page and forgotten to complete the lines, but it was not the dissolute mess and heavy reconstructive job that writers would have you believe.

Which is not to play down the job of an editor! Editing is a time-consuming and critical job, involving a multitude of small decisions. A bad edition can ruin a work and, through that, compromise an artist's reputation,

⁷ Robert Matthew-Walker, review of *British Tone Poems*, vol.1 (Chandos Records), www.classicalsource.com, April 2017.

while a good edition can help readers or performers navigate a piece and make its reading or performance easier, and therefore, we hope, more viable and regular. In editing the poetry there are regularly stances to be taken on whether a word is one thing or another; and more especially when a full stop is a full stop and not a comma or a colon a semi-colon. In a couple of poem manuscripts there are lines which are to one side of the main line of the text which might be annotations, or they might be part of the poem, needing to be inserted within the text. Musically, there are decisions about whether a note is on the line or below it; whether Gurney has omitted an accidental (a sharp or a flat: he often forgets!). There are also those slightly invasive moments, when one must make a decision about whether, as in the *War Elegy*, a part is incomplete and needs finishing. Tied notes or phrases can go over a page-turn but arrive into nothing . . . Then there are the decisions about what to offer as a guide to performers about how to interpret the work: tempo, dynamics (sparingly given by Gurney), style and manner.

As an example of the more extreme end of the editor's job, in his edition of Gurney's Hilaire Belloc setting, *Tarantella*, Ian Venables has constructed a version of the song from two of the five extant manuscript versions, for no single version quite gets the poem right. But this is an exception rather than a rule.

So yes: an editor is required, but Gurney's music does not require the wholesale reconstruction of works from chaotic fragments, as has been suggested. Please put to bed any ideas that Gurney's work is in a chaotic state! That sense of chaos likely hasn't been helped by the until-recently-haphazard state of the archive. During my work on Gurney over the last decade I have reorganised the archive so as to bring all of the literary work into chronological order, making it easier to assess the state of, and the relationships within, this vast body of work. This has made realistic that task of editing the complete poetry; a task currently reaching its apogee on mine and Tim Kendall's desks.

As an editor, one does have to tread a careful line. Whilst wishing to make sense of the music and correcting obvious errors, it is important to present the work as closely as possible to the way in which the author or composer

intended. In his letter to Scott of January 1937, after the first cataloguing session, Finzi made a remarkably prescient observation:

I think the eventual difficulty of 'editing' the later Gurney may be great: a neat mind could smooth away the queerness – like Rimsky-Korsakov with Mussorgsky – yet time and familiarity will probably show something not so mistaken, after all, about the queer and odd things.

In this Post-Modern era, things are more fluid. Expectations and styles are less formally rigid than once they were and the measure of good music has become more flexible. Where once a particular parallel interval or harmonic progression might have been seen as categorically wrong, in a Classical sense, musical opinion is now much more open and accepting. What might have been seen as a weakness or curiosity can now be accepted as an expressive nuance, of which Gurney's are his fingerprint as a composer and as a poet. In an article in the Ivor Gurney Society Journal, Michael Hurd once demonstrated the difficulty of editing some of Gurney's songs. He 'smooth[ed] away the queerness', making them more Classically acceptable, and in so doing removed those fingerprints that made it Gurney.⁸ The same could be said of the poetry. It is the 'queerness' of the language that makes it Gurney. It is notable that, just as Gurney's poetic language was becoming more unique, just as it was becoming *interesting*, his conservative publisher turned down his work. The easy lyricism that sold well was making way for a unique music of a far greater originality.

The pinnacle of Gurney's poetry, in my opinion, comes in 1925–26. It was a hugely prolific period for Gurney, in poetry and music, yet, owing to the stigma of the asylum and the seeming presumption that this late asylum work was somehow incoherent and useless, it has been largely overlooked. Of the extraordinary body of some 380 poems written in 1926, only just over 30 have been published to date. By 1926 Gurney has worked through his immediate situation; he has worked through his memories of experience; and he has emerged out of the other side with a new universality and language joyous in its music; poetry of an energy and generosity that is genuinely remarkable. It is a far cry from the juvenilia of his poetic apprenticeship,

⁸ Michael Hurd, 'Gurney's Unpublishable(?) Songs', *The Ivor Gurney Society Journal*, vol.4 (1998).

served whilst on active service during the war; that body of early work that forms the primary backbone of what we know of Gurney's poetry. Gurney was a true Modernist, although this fact has been diluted in an identification of madness and chaos in his work rather than true modernism.

Such perceptions can be born of expectation; what we expect to find there: What do we bring to Gurney that makes us think we know what he and his work should be? What do we perceive him to be from the few works we know? And how do we take on the mantle of those acolytes and 'find him' for ourselves in such a way as to discover the truth of his work?

Gurney defies boundaries, not least in the fact that he is a composer *and* a poet. As a culture, we have an apparent need to pigeon-hole people; to put them neatly into a shoebox that defines them. Poetically, Gurney is variously a War Poet; a Gloucestershire Poet or poet of landscape and nature; perhaps a 'mad' poet. In the unpublished poetry there are many works that defy these labels, and we should be wary of bringing such labels and expectations to Gurney, even if Gurney himself used the first about himself (albeit for the sake of seeking respect than in definition of himself). Siegfried Sassoon resented the fact that he was labelled a War Poet, a label that afflicted him for the five decades of writing that followed the war. In Gurney's output of some 1,800 poems, just over 300 might be counted as 'war poems', a relatively small proportion.

Musically, Gurney is known almost exclusively as a song composer and a miniaturist. Indeed, Gurney did have a particular penchant for setting words, but he was not only this. Furthermore, while he is allied stylistically with Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, with Elgar and Parry (not without reason), there is something more in his work: an impressionism that comes to the fore in his most intense songs and in instrumental works such as *A Gloucestershire Rhapsody* for orchestra, which only received its premiere in 2010. I heard some rumblings amongst Gurneyites that the work should not have been brought out of the archive, and that, having been heard once, it should be returned post-haste. Finzi, in his 1937 catalogue, gave the *Rhapsody* an X, adding, '[Vaughan Williams] knows this work, and doesn't think it any good.' However, when Robert Matthew-Walker reviewed the commercial

CD release of the work, he singled out the *Rhapsody* as 'a most individual score [...] a uniquely expressive work'.⁹ We are able to experience the piece as Finzi and Vaughan Williams never could, in performance, and can assess it for ourselves. In order to do so properly, we must forget Brahms and those other inheritances, and listen for Gurney. We must *accept the piece on its own terms*. Fundamentally, the music should be *heard*; it should be allowed to live. A similar open-mindedness must be used in his work in other genres that have recently started to open up: the recent premiere and recording of Gurney's 1925 motet for double choir, *Since I Believe in God the Father Almighty* has revealed an extraordinary work in which the choirs occasionally shift against each other like tectonic plates with remarkable effect; and his chamber music is now represented on disc by a violin sonata, cello sonata and a beautiful late string quartet movement. This latter, by a fluke of survival, is a movement from one of those chamber works likely destroyed by Joy Finzi. As Finzi wrote, time has shown 'something not so mistaken, after all'. Not every work is a masterpiece, but the more we are able to read and hear, the closer we can get to the truth of who Gurney is.

Gurney was unable to establish his own name and work. It is only through the efforts of his acolytes, keeping what was often just a lonely candle alight, that he has now established a momentum sufficient to carry his work into the future. However, his reputation, and the regard for and opinion of his work, has been marred by his biography; mired in myths that have accumulated around him. His works have been suppressed, and his manner and modes lost in labelled pigeon holes. We must accept artists on their own terms, through their works alone, without any expectation or preconception. Only then can we genuinely know the measure and truth of an artist.

⁹ Robert Matthew-Walker, review of *British Tone Poems*, vol.1 (Chandos Records), www.classicalsource.com, April 2017.

JEREMY DALE ROBERTS – OBITUARY

Richard Causton

Jeremy Dale Roberts, composer
16th May 1934 - 11th July 2017

Speaking at the Moscow Conservatoire in 2003, the British composer Jeremy Dale Roberts remarked on his music's need to work towards "some kind of positive conclusion: renewal, reconciliation, resolution, celebration or praise". Dale Roberts, who has died at the age of 83, was an artist of exceptional integrity and individuality, whose music encompasses both the intimate and the monumental. His passing also marks the loss of one of the last remaining links to composers such as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gerald Finzi, both of whom he knew personally.

Jeremy Dale Roberts was born in 1934 in Gloucestershire, whose musical life was then dominated by the Three Choirs Festival and what we now think of as English Pastoralism. Although his immediate family was not especially musical, his godmother, Diana Oldridge, ran a local music festival and had been a friend of Gustav Holst. Through her he was introduced to some of the leading composers of the day; but it was not until the time of his studies at the Royal Academy of Music, and his friendship with Christopher (Kiffer) Finzi, son of the composer Gerald Finzi, that he came really close to them. The Finzis' home at Ashmansworth became a bolt hole for the young composer, a nurturing place where he received advice and encouragement, and was welcomed into a wider artistic milieu which included Vaughan Williams. Dale Roberts later described one of these visits, during which he overheard Vaughan Williams at work on his Ninth Symphony: "I was sleeping in the kitchen among the aga and the cats and the huge carboys of mead bubbling away; and VW was in Kiffer's room above. Every morning,

around 4.00am, I would be wakened by the sound of the piano trickling down through sleep; then pad-pad-pad, as he'd go back to his desk. When it came to the performance, I like others was somewhat nonplussed by a first hearing of the music, and evidently said so in my letter to him afterwards. He replied, rather drily – "Thank you so much for writing: I am so glad you liked it – as far as you did: as the man said about Brahms – it ought never to be heard for the first time."

It was also through the Finzis that Dale Roberts met a young Swiss woman, Paulette Zwahlen, who would become his wife of more than fifty years.

Although Dale Roberts' early works - for example the song cycle *Beautiful Lie the Dead* (1954) and the *Suite for Flute and Strings* (1958) – are stylistically indebted to Finzi's music, they already display the eloquence and command of material that would become hallmarks of his later music.

His teachers at the Royal Academy were William Alwyn and the South African composer Priaux Rainier, whose bracingly tough, Stravinskian outlook helped to reorient Dale Roberts' musical thinking away from his earlier preoccupations and imbued it with an enduring muscularity, grit and tensile strength. This can be seen in pieces such as the *Capriccio* (1965) for violin and piano and *Tombeau* (1966-69), a pianistic tour-de-force lasting half an hour whose tautness, rigour and virtuosic energy place it among the most remarkable piano works of the last century.

The monumental aspects of *Tombeau* also anticipate a series of later works which deal, in various ways, with the idea of bearing witness. These include *Stone...Standing Stone* (2002), *Spoken to a Bronze Head* (2009), and three separate pieces entitled *Stele* which - in keeping with Dale Roberts' curiosity and adventurousness - are scored for piano, Javanese gamelan and pipe organ respectively. Inevitably each sounds very different from the others; but they are united by a profound sense of dignity, breadth and authority.

The cultural awakening that took place in Britain throughout the 1960s and 1970s (thanks in no small part to Sir William Glock and Pierre Boulez) was transformative for the generation of composers born in the 1930s, and Dale Roberts was no exception. Commissioned by the BBC to write a string trio for members of the Arditti String Quartet, he responded with *Croquis*



(1976-80), a series of 27 'sketches' arranged in three Cahiers to be performed either consecutively, or disposed throughout a concert in between other works (the composer likened it to a musical meze, or tapas). Dale Roberts wrote that "in this collection - as in any album - there is to be found not only finished work, precisely organized, but also the odd scribble, dashed off: as it were, provisional". Their tone ranges from the explosive - music which

seems to crackle with electricity - to deftness, lightness and elegance: in the movement entitled *Quodlibet*, Dale Roberts shows his hand as a formidable technician by alluding, with apparent effortless, to some thirteen pieces by ten composers - all in less than three minutes.

His fondness for playing with the conventions of concert-giving re-emerges in his last major work, the *String Quintet* (2012, rev. 2013). This time his purpose is theatrical. The two Parts of the piece are designed to straddle the interval of a concert; but when the players return to the stage for the second half, there is an empty chair at the centre of the ensemble. The viola player, whose music has been at the heart of the piece, is missing - a musical reflection upon the death of Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*.

Elsewhere, we catch his impish sense of humour: in the programme note for *Layers*, composed for the tercentenary of Henry Purcell and based on Dido's Lament *When I am Laid in Earth*, he writes "I had first thought of calling this piece 'A Good Lay'. But that didn't seem quite seemly for the occasion...".

Throughout his life, Dale Roberts' work was sustained by an extraordinarily wide cultural outlook. The breath of his musical enthusiasms took in the French Baroque, Ravel and Szymanovsky alongside very different artists such as KD Lang and the band Prefab Sprout. His thinking was influenced

by writers such as Lorca, Rilke, Baudelaire, Novalis, Cavafy, Mandelstam, Proust (whom he read in both French and English) and St. John Perse (whose poetry he translated). He was also widely travelled, having spent time as a serviceman in Cyprus and Egypt and later on, a year in the grasslands of Cameroon, which was to prove formative.

This combination of openness and culture made Dale Roberts a remarkable and very brilliant teacher. After teaching composition at Morley College in London, in 1966 he joined the staff of the Royal College of Music, where he was to remain for over thirty years, latterly as Head of Composition. His unique teaching style arose from his sympathy and generosity of spirit combined with an exacting inner ear, a critical awareness of the implications of musical gesture, and a shrewdly perceptive sense of the needs of the student. This was followed by two periods as Visiting Professor of Composition at the University of Iowa (1999-2000 and 2004).

In later years, Dale Roberts was on several occasions asked to speak about Vaughan Williams and (particularly) Finzi, and some of these talks have been preserved on his website. One of them concludes with lines from the Egyptian Greek poet Constantin Cavafy (1863-1933) which he set to music in the song cycle *In the Same Space* (1976). They hint at the flavour and poetry of Dale Roberts' own work:

Ideal and dearly beloved voices of
those who are dead, or of those who
are lost to us like the dead.
Sometimes they speak to us in our dreams;
sometimes in thought the mind hears them.
And for a moment with their echo other echoes
return from the first poetry of our lives -
like music far off vanishing in the night.

He is survived by his wife Paulette, his daughter Antoinette and son Luke.

Richard Causton studied with Jeremy Dale Roberts at the Royal College of Music as a postgraduate in 1994-5. Following this, they remained close friends until Dale Roberts' recent death.

REVIEW : FINZI CHORAL MUSIC

Martin Bussey

Finzi, Bax and Ireland Choral Music, Hyperion CDA68167

The Choir of Westminster Abbey; Daniel Cook, organ; James O'Donnell, conductor

Finzi: My lovely one; God is gone up; Welcome sweet and sacred feast;

Let us now praise famous men; Lo, the full, final sacrifice; Magnificat.

Bax: I sing of a maiden that is makeless; This worldes joie.

Ireland: Greater love hath no man; Ex ore innocentium; Te Deum in F.

Several elements are striking in this very welcome recording which includes several of Finzi's most significant choral works, and his most significant writing for the Anglican church. Most striking is the sheer musicality of the performances. Atmosphere, intensity and often musical exuberance are hallmarks of the disc. This is attributable in no small measure to James O'Donnell's masterly control of structure, even in the shortest of pieces. These are sung, not as 'mere' service anthems from the repertoire, but with each work treated with musical integrity, shaped and phrased compellingly. This benefits several of the shorter, less familiar Finzi works in particular. *Let us now praise famous men* is a work whose composition for men's voices and organ makes it less regularly heard than most of Finzi's choral output. It is good to hear such a well-crafted performance. The starting point for all performances is the text, as treated by the composer, and the disc contains a fine array of texts, particularly in the Finzi pieces.

The choir is simply one of the best around today and puts its skill fully at the service of the music. This bears greater scrutiny. In the case of several works on the disc, such as Finzi's *Magnificat* and the Bax pieces, the original singers envisaged for the top line were female, and were so in early performances. Hearing them sung by boys' voices presents a different



context. The boys rise to the challenges posed brilliantly, both in terms of musicality and technique. Their tone is robust but shows sensitivity. Above all, their voices give clarity to some highly complex textures without reducing the sound to the straitjacketed tone which is currently the fashion in some professional chamber choirs. The sound then comes fully into its own in works such as *Lo, the full, final sacrifice*,

written for the boys' choir of that immense well of artistic patronage, St Matthew's Northampton, when under the care of Walter Hussey. The frequent passages in thirds which Finzi often writes for top lines have particular clarity in this recording and the boys negotiate Finzi's upwardly leaping melodic lines effortlessly. Turning to the adult voices, another key strength of this recording is revealed. Westminster Abbey boasts immeasurable riches in the 'back rows', made up of singers who are foremost in their field as choral singers, often members of the many other professional groups in London. This cannot be underrated for its impact (listen, for example, to the solo bass in Ireland's *Greater Love*). Exposed lines for, say tenors or basses, are always rich in sound, effortless, and fluently and instinctively phrased. (There is perhaps one moment of alto over-exuberance mid-*Magnificat*, but that can be forgiven).

The high-quality singing of these voices also has impact on the sound of chordal passages. These benefit from a richness in the lower parts, including the altos, that only well-controlled mature voices can bring, creating

balanced but highly resonant singing, particularly notable in the chromatic chordal challenges of Bax's very fine *I sing of a maiden*. The imitative entries towards the end of this piece show off all vocal parts to their very best. The slow build-up of 'All we shall die' in *This worldes joie* benefits particularly from the even quality throughout all parts, as well as impressively sustained long phrases. One can only regret slightly the absence of Bax's *Mater orafiliium* from the disc as it would have been good to hear this fine choir in that most demanding example of twentieth-century English choral writing. Atmosphere is to the fore throughout the disc, aided probably by the fact that most can picture the surroundings in which the recording was made - and devoid of tourists! A key element of creating the atmosphere is the sound of the Abbey organ, superbly played by Daniel Cook. Placing Finzi's *My lovely one* at the head of the disc creates an attractive sense of the vast spaces of the Abbey in its subdued mood. The organ introduction to *God is gone up* makes a dynamic contrast. It might initially lead the listener to look round for a royal procession, but the fulsome brass fanfares on this organ are entirely at one with the performance here. There is a majesty in this version of Finzi's Ascension anthem which entirely suits the text and which can too often be missing in other performances. Perhaps one of the things that Finzi might have appreciated in the performances on this disc is the primacy of the text, to which the ear is directed time and again. Sometimes the resonant acoustic makes demands in terms of clarity but the sense of the poetry, the genre of many of the texts set here, is always foremost in a series of fulfilling performances.

REVIEW : HERBERT HOWELLS'
CLAVICHORD MUSIC

Gavin Roberts

Herbert Howells Music for Clavichord

Lambert's *Clavichord*; Howells' *Clavichord*.

Julian Perkins (clavichord) PRIMA FACIE PFCD065/66

There is something delightful about how the creativity of talented composers and performers is heightened when faced with supposedly limited resources. The poor reception of Howells' Second Piano Concerto in 1925 provoked a crisis of confidence in the young composer. Following his acquaintance with the clavichord-maker Herbert Lambert, Howells began a new love affair with the clavichord, a domestic instrument of bygone ages, to compose some of his most surprising and inventiveminiatures.

Not only are the pieces found in Lambert's *Clavichord* (written in a summer flurry in 1927) and Howells' *Clavichord*, written between 1941 and 1958, personal homages to friends and colleagues, each piece dedicated to a grandee of the English musical establishment, but they connect the composer with a past era of English musical glory. Needless to say, although the pieces of Lambert's *Clavichord* are more obviously inspired by the composers and keyboard styles found in *The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, as Howells progresses into his later work for clavichord, we hear nods to other sound worlds from J. S. Bach to jazz. There is something gentlemanly about the way Howells absorbs and combines the styles of old music, and the music of his contemporaries (he directly quotes Rubbra, Dyson, and Walton in the pieces dedicated to those composers), with music of a distinctly developed

'Howellsian' flavour. Yet, at the same time, one feels the composer cements his own reputation as a truly well-connected English composer. There is a sense that these pieces of great domestic intimacy also provide a snapshot of the whole of contemporary English musical society, with Herbert Howells as the epicentre.

Indeed, this first recording of the complete published clavichord music of Herbert Howells, actually played on the clavichord (John McCabe recorded the same works on the piano in 1994 for Hyperion on CDH55152) seems to be a happy love triangle between composer, performer and the instruments played, and surely one that is welcomed, given the composer's own penchant for the instrument. Reading the CD notes, one is struck by the labour of love that has gone into the recording. Affectionately dedicated to the late Ruth Dyson in her centenary year, who had previously recorded Lambert's *Clavichord* and a selection of pieces from Howells' *Clavichord*, there are detailed notes written by Andrew Mayes. There are also notes on the instruments and how they were chosen from the performer and the clavichord maker Peter Bavington: a Dolmetsch (1925) clavichord for Lambert's *Clavichord*, and a Bavington (2015) clavichord for Howells' *Clavichord*. For two pieces ('Goff's Fireside' and 'Patrick's Siciliano') a delightful, yet intimately voiced Thomas Goff clavichord (1952) is used. At first, such a meagre homage to an instrument appropriate to Howells' own era seems odd, but as is often the case with music of the greatest vision and ingenuity, the desire to choose an instrument that can capture both the essence of an authentic sound world needs to be balanced with the demands of the composer, especially when recording an instrument that normally functions at the lowest dynamic level. Furthermore, the sleeve notes warn the listener that they may experience a 'certain amount of action noise' as such instruments need to be recorded at close range. As a listener, such intimacy with the instruments feels a privilege, and it is beautifully judged by the engineers on this recording. It is one that can only be enjoyed in the modern age through sound recording. Gone are the days when every home housed a clavichord!

Julian Perkins' performances match the originality and creativity of

Howells' music. Indeed, the playing itself champions the cause to hear these pieces played on the clavichord, such that the listener may find it difficult to return to the hackneyed sound-world of the piano. As Howells' compositional skills seem to exist in a playpen of creativity, so Perkins' playing evokes sounds one would think unimaginable on such an instrument. The performer's experience of keyboard music of the past is a great asset to the skill and understanding with which he performs these works, which often foray into realms of advanced modernity. The lyricism of the playing in intimate gems such as 'Lambert's Fireside', and the Purcellian 'Wortham's Grounde' in Lambert's *Clavichord*; and 'Goff's Fireside' (a real highlight on the 1952 instrument, and a striking change of colour on the recording), and the touching epitaph 'Finzi's rest' in Howells' *Clavichord*, is counterbalanced by playing of extraordinary zest and vibrancy. Perkins conjures a brass-like fanfare in 'E B's Fanfarando', whilst seeming to evoke mosquito-like buzzing from the quiet trills. A pleasing feel for the slow dance of the gentlemanly 'Dyson's Delight', with its delicious English harmonic twists, is immediately offset by music that feels like it has emerged from the jazz-club in pieces such as 'Jacob's Brawl', and 'Hughes's Ballet'. There are moments in these upbeat pieces that achieve a percussiveness that would be impossible even on the modern piano. Perkins' touch at the keyboard often evokes the sounds of the lute and guitar, especially in the attractive 'Julian's Dream', a homage to the lutenist and guitarist, Julian Bream. Howells' *Clavichord* concludes with 'Walton's Toy' an explicit extemporisation on Walton's *Crown Imperial*. Such deference to a musical colleague, whilst at the same time epitomising his own personal style, is indicative of the pleasure this collection of endlessly surprising pieces can give. Highly recommended for both clavichord aficionados, as well as the uninitiated!

REVIEW: CELEBRATING ENGLISH SONG

Martin Bussey

Celebrating English Song: songs by Butterworth, Ireland, Venables, Vaughan Williams, Gurney, Quilter, Warlock, Moeran, Britten and Finzi. Roderick Williams, baritone; Susie Allan, piano. SOMMCD 0177

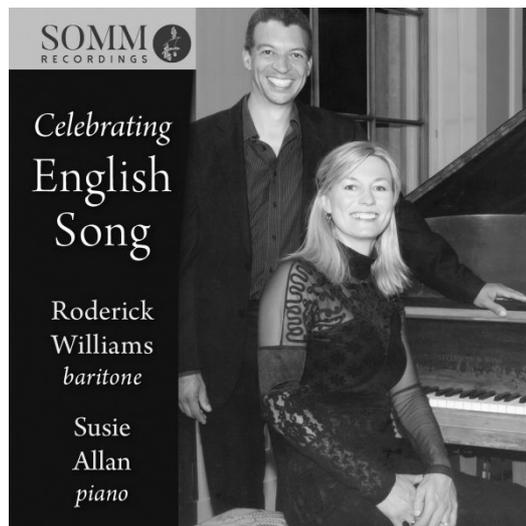
The final concert in the Tardebigge series which gives its name to this disc was, fittingly, given by a singer and pianist who had contributed much to the concerts over many years. The roll of singers and pianists who performed at Tardebigge is illustrious, to say the least, but the singer on this disc was both a favourite of so many, and his approach so closely identified with the ideals of the series, that he was the logical choice to end many years of happy music making. The suggestion was made that the programme on that occasion should be committed to disc, and here it is.

The disc is a fine compilation of some of the most noteworthy English art songs, although those averse to melancholy, wistfulness or poignancy might wish to dip in and out as these moods tend to dominate the genre. Careful planning of the recital, however, means that any danger of an over-rich diet of such fare is averted by strategic placing of more robust repertoire, such as Ireland's *Great Things* or Gurney's setting of Masfield's *Captain Stratton's Fancy*, together with the gentle humour of Venables' *Flying Crooked*. Listening to the complete disc it is Gurney's songs which stand out by virtue of their distinctive harmonic language. Ireland's chromatic intensity is ideally suited to the genre, and in some ways is still underrated for its impact, for example in the poignant Housman setting *In Boyhood* and the variety of textures employed in the imaginative *Youth's Sweet Tribute*. This setting of a Dante

Gabriel Rossetti sonnet handles this notoriously tricky poetic structure with aplomb. Ireland's influence is clear in the music of Venables and a familial harmonic relationship can be heard in Moeran, Quilter and even Warlock. This contrasts well with Butterworth and the early Vaughan Williams represented here, which look back more to the late nineteenth century. Yet it is Gurney's harmonic world which seems to take

us furthest into the emotional world of the poetry he sets, for example in the shifting moods of *BlackStitchel*, each vividly presented. The inflections are melodic, harmonic and, crucially, structural, in terms of phrase lengths, which lengthen or contract according to mood. What Gurney achieves here is a fluidity which sets the music at the service of the poetry. In this, he shares a significant characteristic with Finzi, of course, although on this disc we do not hear Finzi setting Hardy, as was so frequently, and memorably, the case. What is often overlooked in considering *Let us Garlands Bring* is that Finzi is setting Shakespeare, albeit often, although not exclusively, writing Shakespeare song lyrics, such as 'O Mistress Mine'. The challenges Shakespeare poses, not least in audience terms of familiarity with other composers' settings, are met with exactitude by Finzi, particularly in the masterly 'Fear no more'.

The performances are intimate, as befits the disc as a record of the Tardebigge experience. At times the recording might have opened out a little more frequently, as it does successfully for Captain Stratton, particularly with regard to the piano, which occasionally sounds a touch brittle. (It might



have been good for the tuner to spend a little more time at the lower end of the piano as well, before *The Vagabond*, particularly.) Ensemble is tight and Susie Allan breathes with the singer but also takes the initiative when the music demands. Changes of mood are uniform between singer and pianist, and smaller-scale inflexions are seemingly effortless, including in the tortuous, if brief, white-knuckle ride for both performers that is Warlock's *Jillian of Berry*. The full, masterly rhythmic flexibility in these performances is only fully apparent when what is heard is compared with what is on the pages of the scores.

And the singer? It is instructive to hear this disc after Roderick Williams' recent performances as Billy Budd and Balstrode on the much bigger canvases of Britten operas. He remains for many the ultimate 'English baritone' voice, but comparison of this disc with operatic performances shows that this label has been earned, not won by virtue of belonging to any vocal 'type'. Roderick Williams crafts each song, varying vocal timbre with finesse, and his range of colours is wide. Thus *A Shropshire Lad* has a lightness of tone to match the youthful age of the poetry's subject, without darkening the vowel sounds. There is a seeming fragility in the sound (not the technique!) throughout the cycle, except when characterising the 'wise man' in the second song. This gives a much more meaningful context to 'Is my team ploughing' than performances where the vocal timbre is suddenly reduced just for that final song. There is similar restraint in *Silent Noon* which prevents the song from outstripping the perspective of what is an intimate, delicate poem. Elsewhere in the disc greater warmth of tone, and greater resonance is used, to equally good effect, particularly in *Finzi*, hinting at the weight of voice which the singer possesses, but uses sparingly in this genre.

This is a singer who thinks carefully about the timbre he wants for different vowel sounds in different contexts. For example, endings of English words which can be tricky when set to music which elongates the vowel, such as 'ness', are carefully and always sensitively sung, and with varied colour. All the decisions which Roderick Williams makes are at the service of the text and the music. And, finally, to that seemingly effortless breath control: go no further than to the third song of *A Shropshire Lad* to hear how technique

can be at the service of a song. The tempo is fluid but also has poise and is seemingly unhurried. Much of this is achievable because the singer can run two phrases together without seeming about to falter. For example, when the final verse is reached the singer manages 'With downward eye and gazes sad, Stands amid the glancing showers' in a single breath. In this song many singers breathe between every line of text, creating a hiatus in the flow of Butterworth's irregular metre, and consequent bumps in the song's path. Such is this singer's technique that we barely notice him breathe and the music in this song, as with so many others on the disc, flows effortlessly and intelligently.

REVIEW: NIGHTS NOT SPENT ALONE

Complete Works for Mezzo-Soprano by Jonathan Dove.

Henry Page

Kitty Whately, mezzo-soprano,
Simon Lepper, piano.
Champs Hill 2017 CHRCD125

'We were very tired ... We had gone back and forth all night'. Edna St Vincent Millay's words from 'Recuerdo', the first song of the album's eponymous group of settings, could serve well as a cynical assessment of contemporary chamber composition. In an artistic period plagued by the micro-genre, composers often resort to fusing aspects of other genres in an effort to create something new, something subverting that defeatist mantra of everything having 'been done'. When listening to *Nights Not Spent Alone*, Kitty Whately's second album for Champs Hill Records, it might seem evident that Jonathan Dove is guilty of this trope; indeed, through the course of successive song cycles, aspects of jazz, folk, musical theatre, and even cabaret are detectable. The combinations, however, are deft. In setting texts from North American, Indian, Spanish and English poets, Dove succeeds in incorporating apt stylistic brushstrokes whilst retaining his distinctively rhythmic and harmonically expansive sound world. The resulting mien is something that sits between a Brittenesque take on English folksong and a more conservative American jazz standard, with a hint of minimalism along the way.

The ordering of works on the disc demonstrates great consideration towards narrative progression. The opening work, 'My Love is Mine', an

unaccompanied song written in 1997 for a wedding, functions as an opening office, an ideological credo. Expansive, clean, folk-like, the idyll speaks of love and looking to spring. Whately throws down the gauntlet here, giving a powerful, warm, emotionally-present reading of this ebullient melody that establishes the quality of her tone for the rest of the album. This is developed through the variously intimate and excited 'Five Am'rous Sighs'. A warmth reminiscent of Vaughan Williams negates any cheap eroticism in 'Between Your Sheets', leading to a boundless exuberance in 'Finish' and 'All These Dismal Looks', before settling into a more pensive, *lontano* air for 'Venus'.

Cut My Shadow, containing the blackest texts of any of the cycles, sees Dove at his most barbaric: staccatissimo rhythmic cells and jazz-infused harmonies are in abundance. 'Surprise' and 'Song of the Dry Orange Tree', the first and final songs, are at once redolent of Bernstein (reinforcing the theatrical subtext), but also suggest lesser-known Latin voices, such as the Argentinian Alberto Ginastera, and in a more contemporary context, the Spanish composer Antón García Abril. Dove seemingly communicates not only the blunt, yet evocative narrative of each text, but, through a fiery vocal line, the revolutionary character of Lorca himself. Indeed, Whately's almost feral chest-voice declamation of the word 'Madre', set unrelentingly in a melismatic, *forte* falling phrase, is simultaneously angry, sorrowful and fiery; and entirely engaging. Alongside Latin flavourings, the presence of musical theatre is also felt. 'Song of the Dry Orange Tree', in particular, seems to owe a debt to the stylings of Sondheim: the restless motivic repetitions are voiced naturalistically, along with the accompaniment's syncopated added-note harmonies and instances of melodic doubling, such as on 'Free me from the anguish / Of seeing myself fruitless.' The resulting effect is jazzily intimate and eminently theatrical. Mention must be made of Simon Lepper's work in these songs. He masters the volatile Latin rhythms and presents them with great accuracy and *élan*.

The album's new work, *Nights Not Spent Alone*, features texts decidedly naturalistic and nakedly dramatic for their time. This reveals something, perhaps, of the St Vincent Millay's socialist-feminist views. The songs were commissioned jointly by BBC Radio 3, for whom Whately was a New

Generation Artist, and the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artists Scheme. Of the three poems, it is the first two, 'Recuerdo' and 'What Lip My Lips Have Kissed', that share the more consonant dramatic and musical language. The sense of contemplation and distance travelled that pervades these two songs owes a debt to late nineteenth and twentieth century English folksong and chamber works: Britten's folksong arrangements, Finzi's *Earth and Air and Rain* and Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* can all be glimpsed through the sustained vocal line and figure-based, though expansive, piano writing. 'I Too Beneath Your Moon' acts as a synthesis between the bounding folk language and the more rhythmically barbaric stylings of 'Cut My Shadow'. The piano is initially forward-driving, arpeggiated and restless, before changing into a more accented language akin to the earlier Latin sound world. Kitty Whately is afforded her most polarised dynamic moments in this work; from the rhythmic marcato of 'the long necks / Of neighbours sitting where their mothers sat' to the nakedly powerful operatic sound of 'lust', she makes full use of her vocal assets.

Kitty Whately is indeed a revelation. Traversing a range of emotions, styles and articulations, all with a certain melodic consonance, she shows a mature polish and assuredness. One of Dove's defining talents in composing for particular artists is his ability to evoke the stylistic mannerisms of each specific voice. That the titular cycle does not immediately mark itself out as the one dedicated to Whately is a testament to her versatility and vocal maturity. She is gifted a set of works that rely neither on vocal pyrotechnics nor nebulous extended techniques, but rather on a dedication to the dramatic narrative through an inherent lyricism. Dove's preferred technique in writing for the solo voices, evident in each work on this disc, is to write a sostenuto line for the voice, with rhythmic and stylistic gestures largely being found in the piano accompaniment. Even the more spiky, fractious moments in songs such as 'Song of the Dry Orange Tree' and 'I Too Beneath Your Moon' benefit from being constructed of consonant motivic cells. Whately's warmth of tone and immediacy of response are the primary facets in realising an authentic, consistent sound across each cycle. She negotiates all her most operatic moments effortlessly, with a faster vibrato and more

brilliance in her tone. One may perhaps perceive a certain shrillness in these moments; they are nevertheless dramatically appropriate and authoritative.

If the accompanist is indeed the key to deciphering Dove's stylistic influences, the role of the pianist is equal in importance to the singer, and undoubtedly illustrative of the composer's background as a répétiteur. Simon Lepper is responsive and impressively assured throughout the course of each work. Although appearing to have particular appetite for all the most energetic, rhythmic moments, he is deeply sensitive and responsive in the more intimate works. Matching the lyrical intensity of 'All the Future Days', he demonstrates an exquisite restraint combined with an ably nimble touch in the wonder-like ostinatos of 'Autobiography' and 'Spider', whose accompaniments are perhaps the most familiar in their pointillistic repetitions to those who are enthusiasts of Dove's choral music.

Technically, the album is a triumph. The recording, production and mastering are superlative; the resulting sound crystal-clear, yet having the requisite warmth and resonance. The balance between the performers is extremely well-considered: the singer is always prevalent, both in terms of volume in the rounder sound of the disc's more operatic episodes, and of diction in the porcelainic intimacy of quieter moments. Yet Lepper is strong enough to act perfectly as both support and foil where needed. It is the sense of narrative conviction in every respect: text choice, performance, and programme order, that marks this album as noteworthy among a sea of similar releases. What Dove brings to his work through reverence to the narrative, Whately and Lepper complement with emotional and stylistic sensitivity and authenticity. 'From what I had to build with: honest bone/ Is there, and anguish; pride; and burning thought;' The prospect of more music stories from Whately, told with this level of engagement, this 'honest bone', is very exciting.

REVIEW : THE SONGS OF
STEPHEN WILKINSON

Martin Bussey

The Sunlight on the Garden, The Songs of Stephen Wilkinson

Signum classics SIGCD516

Mhairi Lawson, soprano; Clare Wilkinson, mezzo-soprano; James Gilchrist, tenor;
Matthew Brook, bass; Ian Buckle & Anna Markland, piano.

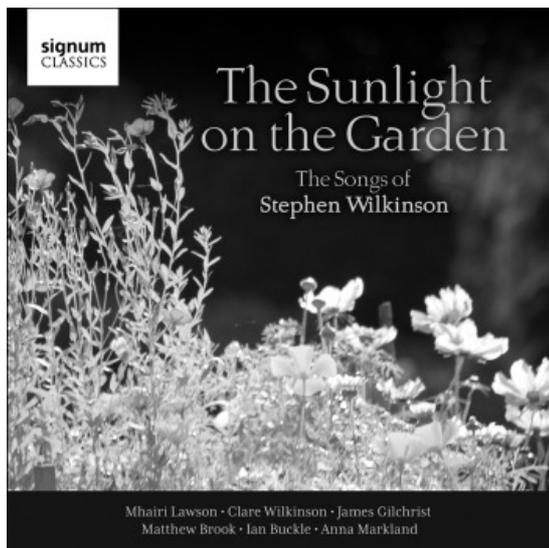
It is very good to see this disc, which enables access to the music of one of the leading choral directors of the late twentieth century, but a figure whose musicianship and immense creativity goes far beyond the confines of choirs. Happily still with us at 98, Stephen Wilkinson directed the BBC Northern Singers for many years. His repertoire was famously wide and eclectic. Notably, it embraced the choral music of contemporary British composers such as John Gardner and Anthony Milner whose star has now fallen somewhat. This breadth of interest is evident in Stephen's own writing, in which the legacy of Finzi can often be discerned. An interesting comparison can be made between Finzi's setting of *Proud Songsters* and that on this disc. The songs on this disc show mastery of diverse styles but always at the service of the text and expressed in a distinctive individual voice. Herein lies one of the strengths of Stephen's conducting and composing. His attention to detail as a conductor was legendary. The author was once the recipient of a private, individual session, because of unavailability for a rehearsal, in which minute details of rests, and where consonants were placed, were rigorously covered, but all within the context of what the text actually meant. Always demanding, Stephen's demands were relayed with a twinkle in the eye that is reflected in several of the songs here. Clare Wilkinson, Stephen's daughter, and one of the most expressive young singers around, has



assembled a group of performers of the highest calibre in this recording.

Economy of musical language is a characteristic of many of the songs on the disc. There is always a singing approach to vocal lines, although this doesn't mean an absence of rigour in the musical language. The chromatic language of *At the manger*, albeit underpinned by insistent pedal notes, gives a vivid sense of Mary's apprehension. The spare setting of Jonson's *The Hour-Glass*, with static vocal lines at times, brilliantly evokes the insistent and unstoppable march of time.

The songs are, typically for the composer, who is something of a polymath, very intelligent in their choice of texts. For example, only one verse of *In the bleak midwinter* is used. The first song is a somewhat ruthlessly but wisely pruned setting of Rupert Brooke's *Granchester*. The songs are musical creations, not slavish recitations of the poems in music. At the same time, the clarity with which decisions were taken regarding the verses or phrases to be omitted enables the many razor-sharp, often epigrammatic, musical ideas which colour individual poetic images so effortlessly to stand out in relief. Central to the disc is a group of W.B. Yeats poems, to which Stephen Wilkinson's impressive intellect is absolutely well matched. *To a Young Girl* is brilliant in the prolonged rhythms of the vocal line which stretch across the apparently regular rhythmic figure of the piano part in an agony of fruitless longing. Similarly, melodic lines which run across the metrical lines of *O do not love too long* enable the sense to be conveyed with great clarity; the message is simple, if dispiriting. Just occasionally an instinctive sense of a rhythmic pattern to suit complex phraseology of earlier days can seem to be at the expense of melodic invention. In passages of *The Garden*, Marvell's



philosophical musings take over from musical immediacy occasionally, although they always lead to a felicitous moment of music image-painting, for example in the final line. Setting twentieth-century verse provokes an instinctive, idiomatic melodic response, well shown in the setting of MacNiece's *The Sunlight on the Garden*, which is particularly adept in capturing the inner

rhythms. The sweep and pacing of this setting is particularly memorable, captured perfectly by James Gilchrist and Anna Markland. There is a similarly instinctive response apparent in the setting of the fond memories of Eleanor Farjeon's *The Gate in the Wall*.

Humour is a key characteristic of the composer's artistic make-up, although amusement is always based firmly on intelligence rather than flippancy. Several of the later songs on the disc transfer the twinkle in Stephen Wilkinson's eye into settings of amusing poetry. In many ways Edward Lear is an ideal song-writing companion. The well-known poems are artfully supported by deft harmonic inflections, a characteristic of the disc.

The piano writing in the settings is often spare. This is apparent from the setting of *Granchester*. Economical textures enable both clarity of text but also an understanding of Brooke's sometimes lengthy groups of lines as they move slowly to their key point. This trait of Brooke is perhaps stretched to the ultimate in his fish-focused *Heaven*. Here, touches of lounge-bar harmony provide necessary relief to the poet's rather too intense conceit of

a fish heaven as a reproof to religious belief. Where textures are thickened, as in the essentially homophonic accompaniment to *Joly Jankyn*, it serves to underline, with a stylistic nod to Warlock, perhaps, the medieval origin of the text. Similarly, in *Maude Gonne takes down a book*, richness of harmony is key to the mood of regret.

The performances are of a calibre to match the songs. Occasionally voices sound perhaps a notch too far forward, but texts are always immaculately clear. The contrasts between the voices are used to excellent advantage,

CONTRIBUTORS

LIBBY BURGESS is a pianist dedicated to the fields of song and chamber music, collaborating regularly with some of the finest singers and instrumentalists of her generation. Her diverse schedule ranges from song recitals in the UK's major concert halls and festivals, to chamber music in obscure venues around the country or appearances on Radio 3. Libby is Artistic Director of New Paths, a major festival of concerts and outreach events in Beverley, Yorkshire, now in its third year. In 2013 she established Konstellation, which presents programmes combining song and chamber music; this dual interest is reflected in her discography, which ranges from *The English Oboe: Rediscovered* with James Turnbull, released in 2013 to excellent reviews, to her most recent disc featuring songs of madwomen with mezzo-soprano Clare McCaldin. Libby is also in demand as a vocal coach, chorumaster and conductor, and until 2015 was Head of Keyboard at Eton College. Libby trained at Oxford (as the first female organ scholar at Christ Church Cathedral) and the RAM.

MARTIN BUSSEY combines the roles of composer, singer and conductor with his work as Senior Editor for the Independent Schools Inspectorate. He was a Choral Scholar at King's College, Cambridge; he studied composition with Robin Holloway and singing with John Carol Case before continuing at the RNCM. He taught at Chetham's School of Music from 1988 to 2013. Martin directs the BBC Daily Service Singers and Chester Bach Singers and is a vocal tutor at Manchester University. He is Chairman of the Finzi Friends and a director of Ludlow English Song. Recent premieres include *Shocklach Sketches* for clarinet and piano, given in February 2017 at the Liverpool Philharmonic Lunchtime series, and *Urizen* for the organ duo of Tom Bell and Richard Brasier, in March 2017. *This same Jesus* was performed at the opening concert of the 2017 London Contemporary Church Music Festival. Recordings include performances on Priory Records, Regent Records, London Independent Records, and *Through a glass*, a recording of songs, by Marcus Farnsworth, James Baillieu and an ensemble directed by Thomas Kemp on Resonus Classics. *The Observer* described *Through a glass, darkly* as 'an enthralling piece, which makes a philosophical exploration of dreams and reality'. Martin is currently writing a song cycle based on the Irish Easter Rising 1916 for the Ludlow Song Weekend in 2018, and a new staged work about Mary Tudor for mezzo Clare McCaldin.

PHILIP LANCASTER is a composer, singer, scholar, lecturer and occasional poet. A leading authority on the works of Ivor Gurney, Philip has edited and realised numerous works for performance, recording and publication, and is co-editing with Prof. Tim Kendall Gurney's complete poetry for publication. Philip is also writing a major study of Gurney's music and poetry. He was lately British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Exeter, where he taught poetry, and was the recipient of a Finzi Trust Scholarship in 2014.

HENRY PAGE is a composer, singer and teacher based in London. He studied at Manchester University where he focused particularly on composition and singing. He now teaches at the Royal Ballet School, as well as being Director of Music at St Matthew-at-the-Elephant on London's South Bank. Henry recently appeared in *Collision* with spectra ensemble at The Arcola Theatre as part of Grimeborn. He was one of the winning Young Composers at the Ludlow English Song Weekend in 2017. Henry is currently writing a commissioned orchestral work for the Nottingham Youth Orchestra and Cantamus choir.

GAVIN ROBERTS enjoys a varied career as a Piano Accompanist. He is Artistic Director of the recital series *Song in the City*, and has partnered singers in recital at The Wigmore Hall, The Barbican Hall, The Royal Festival Hall, The Oxford Lieder Festival and The Ludlow English Song Weekends. Recent and current engagements have included Brahms' *Liebesliedertwitzer* as a duet partner to Graham Johnson, and *A Soldier and a Maker* directed by Iain Burnside. Alongside soprano Lucy Hall, he was the winner of the 2012 Oxford Lieder Young Artist Platform. He plays regularly for The BBC Singers, The Joyful Company of Singers and Constanza Chorus. Gavin studied with Andrew West and Eugene Asti at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama where he is now a professor and a staff accompanist. Gavin is also Organist and Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church.

More details at www.gavinroberts.org