

THE FINZI JOURNAL



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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, organise lunches and lectures, and are involved in promoting the Ludlow Weekend of English Song.

www.finzifriends.org.uk

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the 2018 Journal of Finzi Friends. As always, it has been a privilege to commission new writing about Finzi and his circle of friends and performers. It is a particular pleasure to include within one publication the writing of someone who was actually conducted by Finzi, the much-loved Martin Lee-Browne who has done so much to promote British music over decades, alongside that of young academics and performers who are presenting a fresh perspective on the same music.

I hope you will enjoy Martin's account of the Newbury String Players, a written-up version of his stimulating talk at the Ashmansworth Day in July 2018. It was a pleasure to have Zen Kuriyama with us on that occasion, visiting from the United States. His article describes what happened after he left us to continue his tour of UK libraries with collections related to Finzi. Zen has some interesting thoughts about future areas of Finzi research.

Gavin Roberts follows his knowledgeable review of Howells in last year's Journal with a full article about Finzi's *Seven Part Songs of Robert Bridges*, written from his experiences as a choral conductor as well as imbued with his love of Finzi as a pianist.

Tom Coxhead writes about Kenneth Leighton, one of the many young musicians who benefitted from Finzi's support and guidance early in their careers. Tom is currently completing post-graduate work at Durham University on Leighton's Mass settings and sets out the background to his work; we look forward to reading about his final findings when research is complete.

As always, included are reviews of a number of CDs which will hopefully

interest Finzi Friends members but which also open up avenues of thought about British music, a topic which continues to stimulate comment, engage interest and, occasionally (maybe even through this Journal) provoke argument!

I hope you enjoy reading this year's Journal.

Martin Bussey
November 2018

RESHAPING MUSICAL HISTORY: GERALD FINZI AND THE ENGLISH MUSICAL RENAISSANCE

Zen Kuriyama

'Just the sort of melody I have wanted to do all my life and have never brought off.'¹

(Ralph Vaughan Williams to Gerald Finzi on the central theme in Finzi's *Nocturne, op.7*, 1935)

While scholars have long recognized the importance of the so-called 'English Musical Renaissance' (c. 1840–1940) for the resurgence of cultural nationalism in England, the role of Gerald Finzi (1901–1956) in this movement has been largely neglected. With the help of a research grant from the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, I am attempting to fill in this lacuna and examine the contributions of this putatively minor figure in the development of a distinctly 'English sound'. As a result of my research, I have discovered that Finzi's compositions bear the unique aesthetic traits desired by the English Musical Renaissance, particularly in his treatment of melody and harmony. Given the intricacies in style and the volume of unfinished works, there is still so much to be learned about Finzi's musical mind. I would like to hope that my findings represent a new genesis in Finzi scholarship, one I hope to continue.

The histories of British music have traditionally accorded Gerald Finzi a

1 Vaughan Williams, Ralph. Letter to Gerald Finzi, 5 July 1935. Accessed in Diana McVeagh's book, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 39.

secondary role, behind Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Herbert Howells, in the establishment of an English national school of music. In July 2018, I spent three weeks in the United Kingdom where I analysed Finzi's compositional techniques in his unpublished/unfinished works and the correspondence between Finzi and more-established contemporaries, in order to sketch a different picture of the twentieth-century English musical landscape. This involved examining the relationship between text and music in Finzi's vocal works, delving into his personal relationship with the well-known British composers of the day, and, most importantly, the close study of compositional techniques of unpublished and unfinished works at library archives. At the centre of my conception of Finzi's distinctly 'English' style are the influences of Tudor Renaissance polyphony and English folk song. Composers of the twentieth century English Musical Renaissance were deeply invested in establishing a school of musical composition unique to the British Isles.² The Great Wars in the first half of the twentieth century spurred a strong sense of nationalism in every country involved, and composers laboured to write music that was unique to their home country. In England, this was made manifest in two ways: the resurgence of Tudor Renaissance polyphony (as seen in the efforts of Sir Richard Runciman Terry at Westminster Cathedral)³ and the re-vitalization of the folk song (pioneered by Cecil Sharp and famously executed by Ralph Vaughan Williams through music). While England continued with musical output after the Elizabethan era through the likes of Purcell and Handel, music composition later stagnated in Britain while it flourished on the European mainland. Out of the great courts in the Austro-German lands came the music of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, which for 200 years dominated musical composition in Europe. Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, England became restless for music of its own design and flavour. Spurred by this cultural nationalism, composers began drawing inspiration from England's own history, finding rich soil in the largely untapped English

2 Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *The English musical renaissance, 1840-1940: constructing a national music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 164.

3 Ibid., 76.

musical landscape of Tudor polyphony and folksong. These musical idioms, unique to the island but left untilled, inspired composers of the English Musical Renaissance to focus on their own traditions, rather than emulate the sounds of their mainland neighbours.⁴

The music of Gerald Finzi provides the sonic aesthetic so desired by this movement. Imbuing his harmony with the colour of sixteenth-century Tudor counterpoint and creating melodies of ineffable lyricism that made Vaughan Williams envious, Finzi's writing is the quintessential English sound. While it can be argued that Finzi's music can never be considered 'national' because Finzi himself did not desire to become a nationalistic composer, this does not detract from the calibre of his compositions, nor the nationalistic affect it stirs up.⁵ Robert Stradling and Merrion Hughes' seminal work, *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940: Constructing A National Music*, is the most thoroughly researched and authoritative text on this subject, but it is deficient on the contributions of Finzi.⁶ Within the realm of Finzi scholarship itself, there have been, to date, only two scholars who have published authoritative bodies of text on the composer: Diana McVeagh and Stephen Banfield.⁷ Both McVeagh and Banfield are to be highly commended for their contributions to Finzi scholarship; indeed, any credible work done on Finzi today, including my own, expands upon their work. Still, after reading both of these respective discourses, I believed there was more to unearth about Finzi and his work.

The process of discovery began in earnest in the weeks preceding my trip. One of the pieces I had planned to analyse was Finzi's arrangement of

4 Julian Onderdonk, "Folk song arrangements, hymn tunes and church music," *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams*, ed. Alain Frogley and Aidan J. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 187.

5 Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (Faber and Faber, 2009), 2.

6 In the Conclusion of their book, on page 285, Stradling and Hughes offer a 'super league' of English Musical Renaissance composers: Elgar, Delius, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Walton, Tippett, and Britten. Finzi, both here and elsewhere in the text, is not mentioned.

7 Banfield's *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (1998) and McVeagh's *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (2005) have served as indispensable resources, for which the author is most grateful.

Ivor Gurney's art song, *Sleep*⁸, for string orchestra, which was, according to Diana McVeagh's book, held at St Andrews University in Scotland. McVeagh's book contains the most credible and up-to-date catalogue of Finzi's compositions. However, after extensive inquiry, I discovered that the manuscript was not to be found. Oxford, Cambridge, the University of Reading, St Andrews, the Royal College of Music, the Finzi Trust, even the manuscript and publishing departments at Boosey & Hawkes, none of them could locate the manuscript of this arrangement or knew where it was. After much correspondence, Martin Holmes, Curator of Music at the Bodleian Library at Oxford, eventually emailed me saying that, through some exploratory work, he had managed to find the manuscript parts of this particular arrangement in Finzi's own hand. They were tucked away inside an uncatalogued folder of performance materials belonging to the Newbury String Players, the musical ensemble Finzi had established during the dark days of World War II. Manuscript displacement is very common (and often not communicated to scholars), and active scholarship assumes the responsibility of keeping track of manuscripts lest they become lost.

At The Museum of English Rural Life affiliated to the University of Reading, I viewed over a dozen anthologies of sixteenth and seventeenth-century poetry once owned by Finzi. After some digging (and thanks to Diana McVeagh's book), I was able to find the two anthologies, A.H. Bullen's *The Works of George Peele* and Normal Ault's *A Treasury of Unfamiliar Lyrics*, where Finzi had come across the poems by George Peele and Ralph Knevet that led to the composition of *Farewell to Arms*, op. 9.⁹ Finzi set these two poems in a quasi-baroque recitative-and-aria form, one poem serving as the recitative, the other the aria, more than twenty years apart. These very pages led to the composition of this work that exemplifies Finzi's pacifist and anti-war views, drawn from his contempt, rage, and sorrow at both World Wars. The adding of the recitative in 1944 to the existing Peele aria

8 [See later in the journal for a review of Sarah Connolly's performance of this song in its orchestrated version. Ed.]

9 Diana McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (The Boydell Press, 2005), 136.

text shows how antithetical the brutality of human nature was to Finzi's beliefs. The veteran soldier relinquishing his sword, the 'helmet now an hive for bees become,' 'th'unarmed soldier'; Finzi set Knevet's texts as prayers. War-inflicted emotional turmoil was formative for Finzi: his first composition teacher and friend, Ernest Farrar, died at the Front just weeks before the First World War Armistice, having only been there for two days. An obsessive reader of lesser-known poetry, Finzi's discovery of these two texts must have really resonated with him, and led to perhaps his most pseudo-autobiographical work for solo voice and strings. Most notable is the introduction to the aria, a quintessential example of folk melody in a chamber music setting. Furthermore, Finzi had omitted the last stanza from both of these poems, perhaps symbolizing that the sacrifice of the 'glorious dead' should have the final word.

Vital to the work on any composer is an understanding of their disposition and their compositional *modus operandi*. At the Bodleian Library, I came across the original manuscript of his song, 'I say, "I'll seek her side"', and saw that Finzi had written 'scrap' in big, red letters across the top. It is one of Finzi's most affecting songs, with a tri-partite form that employs the full arsenal and breadth of Finzi's compositional prowess. Likely considered for his song cycle, *By Footpath and Stile*, we know from its revision history (he wrote the song in 1929 and revised it in 1955, the year before he died), that he struggled with it. Yet, within 38 measures, Finzi gives us a world. His settings of Thomas Hardy's poetry are unparalleled, (the Schubert-song expert Susan Youens remarked to me how moving is his handling of Hardy's texts), and what Finzi gives us musically in these four stanzas is breathtaking. The rush of indecision in the beginning showed by fleeing semiquavers; the tender regret at his lover's distraught glance in the second stanza, over a stepwise descending melody; the folk song homage in the third with its dotted rhythms and a fourth intervallic oscillation progressing stepwise with the rustic imagery; and the text painting in the fourth verse on 'the shadows are abating' with a 2-1 suspension over a second inversion tonic chord that only Finzi could achieve, complete with a Picardy third cadence

at the close. All this, and Finzi, ever exacting and critical, wrote, 'scrap'. This type of scathing self-evaluation was perhaps detrimental to Finzi's career, and we know that his perfectionism stunted many projects.

The Bodleian contains the crown jewel of Finzi manuscripts: his unfinished/unpublished 'abandoned piano concerto' (listed as such in the Bodleian Library catalogue). The abandoned piano concerto was not only left to the fates by Finzi, but also by scholars: no substantial attempt has been made since Finzi's death to unearth the compositional treasures that lie in the manuscript sketches, bound together now in a single volume. While the second movement was posthumously published as *Eclogue for Piano and Strings, op. 10*, and we know that the *Grand Fantasia, op.38* (to which Finzi later added a *Toccata*) was intended to be a part of it, the other movements remain unanalysed. When I viewed the sketches, I found musical writing of astounding complexity, breadth, and virtuosity. The harmonic language, with sensitively placed dissonances and an instrumental texture that maintains warmth despite its open texture, is distinctly Finzian, yet its pianistic writing resembles more a Rachmaninov concerto than a pastoral elegy. One immediately gets the impression while viewing the sketches that Finzi was attempting to master the art of declamation. On page 4 of the first movement, Finzi writes 'pocoritard', 'rattivando', 'strepitoso', and 'allargando', all within three measures. This meticulous attention to performance detail may have contributed to the demise of its completion; indeed, the various sketched passages often lack coherence and are fragmentary. Still, Finzi wrote music for every movement. Although incomplete, much can be inferred and/or pieced together from what we know today of Finzi's idiosyncratic compositional style: a penchant for Tudor-influenced harmony, primacy of melody always vocal in nature, baroque-inspired techniques and formal structure, and tonal ambiguity flanked by diatonicism. I was given explicit permission by the Bodleian to take photographs of the manuscript, and I believe that, after careful analysis and future study, this abandoned piano concerto can eventually enjoy the due privilege of performance, in either abbreviated form or full completion by a scholar.

In my final degree recital at Notre Dame, I will be conducting Finzi's

Farewell to Arms, and at the Bodleian I was able to view, study, and photograph the original manuscript which Finzi himself used to conduct the work. Of considerable importance to me were the conducting beat patterns Finzi wrote for the several tricky metre changes in the recitative. As a conductor, it is of the greatest value to conduct a piece of music with the same precision and beat patterns as the composer. I will also be conducting Finzi's *Prelude for String Orchestra in F minor*, op. 25, pairing it with Arvo Pärt's *Stabat Mater* for SAT choir and strings. The harmonic language, melodic motifs, and texture of Finzi and Pärt are astoundingly similar, and, to my knowledge, parallels have never been drawn between the two composers. Pärt, the Estonian composer who hearkened back to early Orthodox compositions and 'invented' the compositional device *Tintinnabuli*, created a musical language by revitalizing another, just as Finzi did.

On my visit to the UK I also analysed a great treasury of unpublished songs and choral music that, while seeming immature at first glance, display Finzi's compositional influences, notably that of Tudor Renaissance polyphony. 'How shall a young man', which sets a text from Psalm CXIX as set in William Byrd's *Psalms, Sonnets, and Songs*, presents as a motet from sixteenth-century England. For the purposes of my research in establishing that Finzi's compositions synthesized Tudor polyphony and folk melodies in such a way to develop a wholly new musical language, analysing this neglected early composition was exciting and revelatory. With its canonic entries at the fifth, melodic lines laden with thirds, and frequent harmonic use of a sixth between the soprano and bass, this four-page piece bears all the signature characteristics of the composer who inspired it. Further analysis showed, however, that even in his early stages of composition Finzi's own style was bursting forth. The piece begins in F major starting on the fifth scale degree, yet in measure 10, Finzi introduces an E-flat simultaneously in both the alto and tenor, which both resolve to D. While later expanded upon so that it could be suggested that Finzi was writing in C minor, it seems more likely, given no modulatory sequence, that Finzi was suggesting a Phrygian scale beginning on D. This sudden shift to modality, while not uncommon in Renaissance-era compositions, seems suggestive of folk melodies, which

so often are based on modal scales. My hypothesis was then given further credibility on the penultimate page, where Finzi introduces a new motif in the bass, following a sonorous A-major cadence. The new thematic material is disjunct, even jaunty, resembling Stravinskyan melodic primitivism rather than a melody in a Tudor motet. Teachers of counterpoint would likely criticize such writing and dismiss it as bad counterpoint, but this conjoining of the sacred and the secular (i.e. a jaunty, boisterous folk song) may have been exactly what Finzi was intending. If so, English nationalists and musical erudites in the first half of the twentieth century need not have looked any further for a proponent of nationalism. It is also likely that this composition pays homage to another non-prolific English composer: Edward Bairstow. Bairstow's *Counterpoint and Harmony* (1937) adheres to harmonizing modal tunes within a modality and without accidental pitches. This approach gave composers the impetus to distance their writing from Common-Practice Period rules of counterpoint while simultaneously recreating the language of Tudor polyphony. Finzi's later compositions indicate that he did not take Bairstow's views on counterpoint as doctrine, but we can nonetheless attribute Finzi's distinct harmonic language in part to Bairstow's influence.

Lastly at the Bodleian, I viewed Finzi's arrangement of Ivor Gurney's song *Sleep* for strings already mentioned, and his arrangement of the popular hymn tune, *When I survey the Wondrous Cross* by Hubert Parry. I was able to conclude decisively that even in his arrangements Finzi's musical language embodies the 'English pastoral', with what English music critic Frank Howes described as, 'the gentle, undramatic but strong and persistent musical equivalent of the English countryside.'¹⁰ The instrumental texture has breath and vastness, without sacrificing melodic integrity and the prominence of harmony. What I encountered next in the Special Collections at St Andrews University was perhaps a more fruitful form of research for establishing a nationalistic composer: hundreds of hand-written letters between Finzi and Cedric Thorpe Davie, a close friend to the Finzis and

¹⁰ Hughes and Stradling, *The English musical renaissance, 1840-1940: constructing a national music*, 168.

Master of Music (later Full Professor) at St Andrews. These letters were micro-treatises into Finzi's compositional style: his unconventional view on key relationships and modulations, fiery rants about musical form and structure and the importance of redefining them, and mention of key sources of artistic inspiration, running the gamut from folk song and poetry to Brahms's c-minor string quartet and Beethoven symphonies. A frequent criticism of Finzi's music is his unconventional way of modulating, which can sometimes seem jarring and unpredictable. In a 1933 letter to 'Ceddie', GF writes, '...you're quite right in saying that I don't care a damn what the key is (always supporting that it's satisfactorily done and provides the contrast).'¹¹ Rather than try to fit into a mould, Finzi's entire oeuvre seems to be in protest against conventional systems of composition. One would expect no less from a pacifist, and certainly from a composer creating, without realizing it, a sound devoid of mainland, namely Teutonic, influence.

At the Royal College of Music in London, I read three decades of correspondence between Finzi and Herbert Howells, a vital figure in English music and the largest contributor to the Anglican church music canon in the twentieth century. Not only did Howells find Finzi to be a peer of remarkable depth and beauty, it was clear from several letters how much Howells admired Finzi's compositions, especially his settings of English texts and his knack for writing melodies. One such example is a letter to Finzi dated 18th November 1951 in which Howells expressed his discontent with an Ivor Gurney song he was arranging, to which Finzi replied with a list of emendations that Howells eventually incorporated. This was just one of several instances where this junior composer was called upon by Howells to offer clarity, insight, and advice. Furthermore, Howells believed in Finzi's personal and artistic integrity, remarking in a letter of 11th August 1953 to GF, 'I would be greatly touched if anyone, especially a musician of your quality, would really acknowledge and write about the better and more

11 Gerald Finzi. Letter to Cedric Thorpe Davie. 1933. Special Collections, St Andrews University, Scotland.

worthwhile of the music I've tried to get done.'¹² This discredits Banfield's assertion that 'we shall never really know what Howells thought of Finzi's music.'¹³ Howells's request of Finzi's musical criticism is indicative of the esteem in which he held Finzi's compositions. I also analysed the autograph manuscript of the piece Howells wrote in homage to Finzi the day after he died, and came across an interesting 'discovery'. Upon requesting to look at the manuscript for *Finzi's Rest*, I was handed a manuscript that read *Finzi: His Rest*. Thinking it was merely a mistake in title transmission, I went along with my analysis, only to very quickly realize that this was a significantly different piece from the one with which I was familiar. I turned to the autograph, to discover that it was dated the day after Finzi's death. Howells seemed to have written two different pieces in homage to Finzi the day after he died, the second of which, *Finzi's Rest*, was published and circulated.¹⁴ While *Finzi's Rest* is a beautiful tribute to Finzi, paying direct homage to Finzi's deeply elegiac and melancholic writing, *Finzi: His Rest* offers a different perspective on Finzi: the writing is more dissonant, introspective, unconventional, even rebellious. The work is unpublished and untouched, and I believe it is the emotional and cathartic product of a grieving Howells, in memory of this man we are only beginning to understand fully.

I believe my findings will contribute to the existing scholarship on Finzi, in addition to challenging both the existing critical reception of Finzi's work and his place in the history of English national music. It was through my efforts that an uncataloged folder of orchestra parts in Finzi's hand were discovered, which will now be added to the Finzi catalogue at the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Additionally, my analysis of Finzi's abandoned piano concerto will serve as a rebuke to the criticisms against the harmonic and compositional ingenuity of both the *Grand Fantasia* and the *Eclogue*. Hector Bellman wrote that the *Fantasia* is 'probably the least interesting among

12 Herbert Howells, Letter to Gerald Finzi. 11 August 1953. Howells Collection, Royal College of Music Library. Accessed July 2018.

13 Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, 65.

14 *Ibid.*, 65.

the instrumental works of Finzi'.¹⁵ Bellman's statement is a product of the ignorance that many have about the composition of the abandoned piano concerto, for which the *Fantasia* was intended, unaware of the depth and complexity of the work and the painstaking detail Finzi took in its composition. The analysis of the William Byrd-inspired setting of *How shall a young man* directly proves my hypothesis correct that Finzi hearkened to the language of Tudor polyphony to form his own compositional style. The correspondence between Finzi and Cedric Thorpe Davie and Herbert Howells remains unpublished: I believe careful analysis of the letters, of which I have personal digital copies for self-study via permission from the archive curators, and of which little has been presented here, will prove essential in establishing Finzi's place amongst the compositional giants of the English sound. Lastly, in addition to the hagiographic nature in which his contemporaries wrote about him, I believe my research and study of *Finzi: His Rest* will result in a changed perception of Finzi, both the man and his music, by both musical scholars and the general public alike. §

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¹⁵ Hector Bellman, "Grand Fantasia and Toccata for piano & orchestra in D minor, Op 38; Description by Hector Bellman." www.allmusic.com. Accessed July 2018.

THE NEWBURY STRING PLAYERS, 1940 - 1956

Martin Lee-Browne

(An edited version of a talk given at the 2018 AGM of The Finzi Friends in Ashmansworth Church)

I was at Leighton Park School in Reading, where, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Head of Music was John Russell, a very great friend of the Finzis. I was originally a cellist, but my quite excellent teacher (a former player in the Hallé) wouldn't make me practice, so I gave it up and became the timpanist in the school orchestra instead. One day John Russell asked me if I would like a 'gig' (although it wasn't called that in those days!) with the Newbury String Players [NSP], because their regular (albeit, as they were just a string band, only occasional) timpanist couldn't manage the date of the concert. Of course, I accepted. My memories are, however, sadly very vague indeed, probably because I was scared out of my wits! I do, though, vividly remember the regular timpanist, as he supervised me in rehearsals. He was a marvellous old man who used to play, I think, in one of the big London orchestras, and he taught me how to make timp sticks; I still have them somewhere in the house, hoping for a comeback! Checking through the original programmes, it seems that I probably played in two concerts in 1949 (when I was 18) and possibly 1950, and the works, if I remember aright, were Mozart's *Serenata Notturmo* K.239, movements from Bach's Cantatas Nos 34 and 190 (the latter the great 'Singet dem Herren'), and Vaughan Williams' arrangement of Let us now praise famous men with an orchestral

accompaniment.

Happily, I was able to track down what seems to be the only commercial recording ever made of the NSP, in 1965.¹ The Finzi's eldest son Christopher was conducting, and they accompanied Jacqueline du Pré in Edmund Rubbra's *Soliloquy*. Unfortunately, the balance is not good, and most of the time she drowns them, but from what one can hear they certainly sound fine. They in fact made one other, private, recording, in 1957, with Christopher conducting Anna Shuttleworth, Nigel Finzi and John Russell in four of John Stanley's String Concertos.

Gerald loved having a wide sky around him, and in early 1937, when he and Joy were looking for a house, they went to see a sixteen-acre farm on the high ground south of Newbury, with a view almost to the South Coast. There was a ruined farmhouse, with a thatched barn and other outbuildings: Church Farm. Joy wrote in her diary:

The first time we came to Ashmansworth, up the narrow climbing lane from a warm green valley, blue shadows lay with an intensity on the snow, that I have only seen in Switzerland. The ash trees made strong patterns against dark sunny sky ... Quietness sounds there - and the earth has hospitality.

That visit proved propitious, for they bought the property, rebuilt the house and the other buildings, and it remained in the family until only a few years ago.

They had hardly moved in in March 1939, when the first signs of World War II loomed on the European horizon, with Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia. Gerald was, of course, a Jew, and he immediately recognised the urgent need to fight and defeat Nazism; he stopped composing and readied himself for call-up. With the onset of the Phoney War, as it was called (the period from September 1919 until April 1940, when nothing warlike seemed to happen), Ashmansworth became full of evacuees from London, and, as did a number of others in the village, the Finzis agreed to accept some of them, even though the work at Church Farm was unfinished. Sometimes

1 Cello Classics CC1010: The British Cello Phenomenon.

they had 11 sleeping in the house.

Gerald joined the Home Guard, which, surprisingly, he enjoyed: he actually became a platoon sergeant, and was amused by the fact that, as a member of the Home Guard, he was in a reserved occupation; 'like mole-catchers', he said. People discovered that war takes place in the countryside, and in the autumn of 1940, 'as the country came within an inch of its life in the battle of the air, there were dogfights overhead, a nearby village was strafed, and with the area's strategic altitude huge searchlights moved into the fields, and a wireless training station was built in the village ... by Christmas, Southampton was a red glow on the horizon every night'². After the invasion of France, Gerald could only wait until he was conscripted. He was afraid that he wouldn't make a very good soldier; as he said, 'I had never fired anything since bow and arrow days, but however pacific I am I couldn't honestly have any conscientious objections about an affair of this sort'.

He was expecting to be called up in August 1941, but Arthur Bliss (who had recently been appointed the BBC's Director of Overseas Music) got him an offer of a job there; though, as Gerald said in a letter to a fellow-composer William Busch, 'one would have been involved with a little music and much muck, office work, concert agency & all the BBC schimozzle!'³. However, someone else put his name forward for the Ministry of War Transport, so he turned Bliss's offer down and went up to London for his interview at the Ministry in his only suit, bought off the peg in a Harrods' sale in 1928. He was accepted, and appointed Temporary or Assistant Principal in the Foreign Shipping Relations Division, in charge of South American shipping. A less suitable job would be hard to imagine: he described it as a sort of 'HerrOberprofessortrinkendanzenshniffelpopper!' ⁴and he realised that he would find it very tiring. As he wrote to the composer William Busch:

It's going to be a hard job, with responsibilities, & means (horror of horrors) working in Berkeley Square daily from 9.0 am till 6.30 pm, with

2 Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 274.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

4 Diana McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (Boydell & Brewer 2005), p. 123.

only Sundays off to get down to Joy and the children, & to look into my own affairs. I have been lucky in getting rooms in Frogmal Lane, which is not too far out, thanks to some friends who have evacuated to the country, but left their furnished house in charge of an old housekeeper who won't budge. It remains to be seen whether I shall have enough energy left in my evenings for music, especially when the blitzes start again. However, the war won't last forever, and I would rather be doing something totally unrelated to music than that sort of half & half BBC job. And I ought to be very grateful to have a chance of using brains instead of brawn, for I shall at least be of more use than doing sentry work on Dartmoor.

Clothes are my chief difficulty, as I really will have to get a suit, and Joy, presuming that I would be called up, used all my coupons on underwear (for me)!⁵

That winter, there was a Great Frost, when there was little power, light or telephone, and everywhere the weight of the snow brought trees down. Then, during the following summer, the war situation got worse, and, although the country's spirits generally remained remarkably high, life for the entire population became very restricted. Gerald became increasingly depressed and isolated from music, but one day Joy noticed that Ashmansworth Church had extremely good acoustics and the idea of the NSP was born. They both realised that to attract anything more than passing interest, the standard of the music-making had to be good (or better), so Joy, who played in the Newbury Amateur Orchestral Union, as it was called, recruited some of its better players, and Gerald offered to conduct. Before the first concert, he wrote to his greatest friend Howard Ferguson:

We've got a little body of twelve strings together - people like Mrs Neate, Mrs Turner, Mrs Finzi, etc & are doing Boyce Symphony No. 4 (a delightful work, which Robin [Milford - another lifelong friend] put me on to, rather like a procession of fat aldermen), the Sinfonia from Bach's *Cantata No 156*, 'Pastorale' from the Corelli *Christmas concerto*,

5 Banfield, *ibid.*, p. 278.

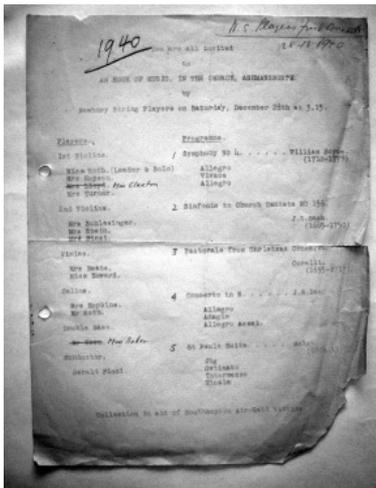
Bach *Concerto in E*, played by Rosie Roth & Holst's *St Paul's Suite*.⁶

Gerald called the players his "twenty-five old ladies" but Vaughan Williams rebuked him, writing that his 'excellent orchestra ... includes several young and lovely women (including your own wife)'.⁷ Rosie Roth was a local refugee, and actually the leader: 'not unproblematic', Banfield called her.⁸ When rehearsals for the concert began, Gerald discovered that she had never played the Bach concerto before, and she suggested that she played what she thought was another concerto, the Tartini *Devil's Trill Sonata*, instead. Gerald's comment afterwards was 'What *must* the Budapest Conservatoire have been like?'⁹

To avoid the blackout, and the hazards of driving with very limited lights, the first concert took place in Ashmansworth Church on the afternoon

of 28 December 1940, then, of course, unheated and unlit by electricity. The Finzis were delighted with the result. In spite of petrol rationing and the cold, there was a very good audience, and the players really enjoyed themselves: there was no question but that they wanted to play together again. In Banfield's words: With one stroke, it concentrated the genius loci [the protected spirit of a place] of his new, chosen home and hallowed his secular yet transcendent vision of music in the community ...¹⁰

Although it may well not have seemed like one at the time, it turned out to have been a very 'special occasion',



The programme for the first concert on 28 December 1940.

- 6 McVeagh, *ibid.*, p. 118.
- 7 Banfield, *ibid.*, p.283.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid* p.284

because the NSP and what it stood for in those dark days became something very sacred indeed to the Finzis. It was almost an extended family, for both them and the players. The young cellist Anna Shuttleworth (just out of the Royal College of Music), like many others, often stayed with the Finzis, and in her autobiography she wrote:

I felt at once that somehow I belonged there, musically, spiritually, artistically and intellectually. In every way their way of living was so rich, not with money but with warmth and friendship based on similar ideals about music and life. I do not know that they felt that especially about me, but they seemed happy that I should come down whenever possible to play at Newbury String Players concerts and stay with them over many memorable Sundays ... Some of the charm of these concerts was the magical settings, the meeting of old friends and the love of music generated by everyone involved.¹¹

Banfield commented that the first concert 'trod on toes in a way scarcely imaginable today': Milford had written to Gerald wishing that the programme had included a non-sacred piece, at which Gerald was pretty upset, for he replied:

Here we are, once again, at the roots of this intolerance, which all beliefs (as opposed to 'ideas & feelings') seem to beget. Thus Mrs S— of our village, was horrified that Mrs W— a confessed unbeliever, should come into the church to hear the music & went as far as to say that she should not have been allowed in. Mrs W—, on the other hand, was appalled at the Vicar's prayers, which she thought quite out of place. Mr A - the churchwarden - thought the collection of £11.1.6 very remarkable. Oh, how much bigger music is than all this & why should it be tied down to earth by a Communist rope, or a Fascist rope, or a Church rope or a Chapel rope or a pagan rope or any bloody rope.¹²

It is sufficient in itself. Incidentally, if it has to be the handmaid of religion, which religion? And why was the Bach *E major concerto* any

11 Ibid.

12 McVeagh, *ibid*, p. 119

more religious that the Holst, & was that lovely Sinfonia necessarily suitable for a church just because it prefaces a church cantata? It happens to be also used as the slow movement of a secular concerto & so on. I should have been just as happy doing that music in a village hall as in the church, but I admit that the setting was marvellous & that in itself was part of the art. I didn't rejoice that only 4 people go to Church on a Sunday & 100 came to hear music on a weekday. It doesn't matter to me whether 4 or 40 go to Church, as I have never yet found anyone better or worse for going or not going.

and then he came to the crux of his feelings:

But I did rejoice to think that, perhaps for the first time in history, most of the Chapel attended the church, and that agnostics, RC's, Anglo C's, Jews, Chapel & C of E were all gathered together, seeing a beautiful sight, listening to decent music & with all their ridiculous differences dropped for at least an hour.¹³

The next concert was on 5th April 1941 at Burghclere Church, with sixteen players. The programme was partly a repeat of the December concert, but also included Purcell's *Set of Tunes*, and the Elgar *Serenade for Strings*. The soloist was a neighbour of the Finzi's, the Swiss soprano Sophie Wyss, who had settled in England, and she sang 'The Salutation' ('These little Limbs, These Eyes and Hands') from *Dies Natalis*, together with Purcell's 'When I am laid in earth', a Byrd *Lullaby* and Vaughan Williams' *Evening Hymn*. On the back of a copy of the single sheet programme (price twopence, and doing nothing more than just list the pieces played!), Joy wrote: 'This is the sort of thing we are doing until Gerald is called up. We have wonderfully overcrowded churches - and that after only the second concert!' The Burghclere concert was followed by two more in the same month, at East Woodhay, and in the Newbury Musical Festival 'War-Time Concert', where the NSP accompanied 14 massed choirs in Parry's *Jerusalem*.

The custom began of having a collection for a local good cause. At Burghclere it was for the Bishop of Winchester's Church Fund for Air

13 Banfield, *ibid.*, p. 284

Raid Distress in Southampton, at two others the proceeds were 'for free entertainment of members of HM Forces stationed in Berkshire' and, in Kingsclere 'Wings for Victory Week', perhaps the equivalent of today's 'Help the Heroes'. In that context it was the sort of tiny, but nevertheless significant, thing that helped to keep communities and local organisations intact in the face of hardship on a scale that we cannot now imagine: the deaths of family members on active service, and even fear of a German invasion. The first six concerts raised £100 or so, the equivalent of around an astonishing £5,000 today.

Joy Finzi was once described as 'a 20th century Renaissance woman who possessed extraordinary vision, and a remarkable gift for anticipating new trends before they began'. She was an artist, a sculptor, a poet, a musician and an organiser who made things happen. Added to that, the management of the band was in her hands: and what a business it would have been.

Like any amateur orchestra, there were always additional players to be recruited for a particular concert; non-attenders at rehearsals to be chased-up; music to be found and borrowed (there was, of course, no photocopying then); venues (once even as far away as somewhere in Bedfordshire) to be fixed; auditions to be arranged; even getting petrol coupons; and in due course, applying for funding. Joy not only played with the second violins in almost every concert, but also managed to keep the house running, and look after the lively Christopher and his brother Nigel.

The little orchestra obviously needed a while to settle down. The players had to get accustomed to GF's beat and mannerisms, and learn to listen to each other, but the standard of the playing steadily got more assured, to the point at which Milford could say, early 1942, that they had 'improved out of all recognition - honestly, if I had been behind a curtain I don't think I would have known that it was the same band as when I first heard them in Ashmansworth Church!' ¹⁴. Not everyone, though, thought the same: also in 1942, after going to a NSP concert at Bradfield College, Benjamin Britten, who happened to be staying the weekend with Sophie Wyss, thought that it

¹⁴ Ibid., p.283.

was 'amateur (and how!)' and that Finzi's evident enjoyment at what they were doing, was the 'I prefer this to those horrible professionals sort of thing - ugh!'¹⁵

To begin with, Finzi did not much enjoy conducting. He had first stood in front of an orchestra in 1935, with a section of the BBC Orchestra (the only one it had in those days) playing the New Year Music, and after first NSP concert he wrote to Ferguson saying:

Well, I shall never make much of a conductor – but I'm glad the players want to carry on, as it's something to fill the terrible hollow feeling that the absence of music and music-making gives me. Curiously enough, I find conducting a sort of watertight compartment, and it seems to bear no relation to the creative side of one's mind. Perhaps not with a Toscanini, but I can now better understand why conductors, for all their experience, are not necessarily intelligent musicians, and are so often incompetent scorers.

Anna Shuttleworth said that Finzi's conducting: "like his music, was not predominantly rhythmical. He waved his arms about in an imaginative style, and we all did our best to follow him." Someone else said that he had a way of holding his baton from underneath, which lost him authority, until the viola player Jean Stewart demonstrated during a meal with a carving knife to show him how it should be held. Rubbra once told him that he had a habit of 'leaning to the right always, whatever you are doing', and that he (Rubbra) often felt he had to copy him in his seat; while the baritone John Carol Case thought that "he wasn't as bad as VW". However, working week after week with NSP, Finzi grew more confident, and by 1946 he felt assured enough to agree to conduct *Dies Natalis* at a Three Choirs concert.

Finzi did, however, enjoy introducing the music at concerts, although sometimes he could be quite blunt. At one NSP concert, before the Bach *Double Concerto* (with Kiffer and Nigel as the soloists), he said that: "the slow movement is perhaps the most beautiful piece of music ever written. If this means nothing to you, you can go out, there is nothing else for it".

15 McVeagh, *ibid.*, p. 128.

The repertoire expanded rapidly: there is a full list of everything the NSP played at the back of Diana McVeagh's biography.¹⁶ To the works played in the first two concerts, during 1941 they added music by 15 different composers, including Grieg's *Holberg Suite*; Bach's *A minor Violin Concerto*, played by Sybil Eaton, a well-known violinist of the time, who was Gerald's first love when he was studying with Edward Bairstow, the organist of York Minster, towards the end of the Great War; the Bach *Double Concerto* (originally with Edmund Rubbra and his wife as soloists); Robin Milford's *Suite for oboe and strings*; a Handel Organ Concerto; Arensky's *Variations on a theme by Tchaikovsky* (by no means an easy piece for amateur players), Bach's *Giant Fugue* (BWV 680) arranged by Vaughan Williams and Elgar's *Elegy* (played in memory of a member of the orchestra who had died).

In a talk that he gave to the Friends in 1996, Christopher Finzi explained how his father's search for new repertoire for the NSP was the path that led to his discovery of unknown eighteenth-century music, particularly because at that time it was possible to buy original editions very cheaply. Finzi spent many hours in second-hand music shops looking for works that, when edited, would be within the band's technical capacity. His first 'find' was the blind organist John Stanley who lived between 1712 and 1786; in 1947 Gerald produced a version of his *Trumpet Tune*, and the following year editions of two of his concerti for strings and continuo. His favourite composers, apart from Stanley, were all nearly exact Stanley-contemporaries: William Boyce, Thomas Arne, Charles Avison, John Garth and Richard Mudge. After the first performance of his reconstruction of one of Garth's Cello Concertos, Joy wrote in her Journal:

He gradually found that by eliminating nearly everything that was added by editors, keeping to the notes that were written in the first place, trying to adhere and understand the intentions of the age and the composer, (including the necessity for a continuo) quite a different picture of the eighteenth-century school appeared.

Gerald strongly disagreed with those who thought that these composers'

16 See note 4 above.

works were simply pale imitations of Handel. In her biography, Diana McVeagh makes a nice connection between music and Gerald's amazing work in his beloved apple orchards:

His attitude to Cox's Orange came to be like his attitude to Handel: both were good but overpowering: Cox had overshadowed [a similar variety] Golden Harvey, as Handel had overshadowed John Stanley.

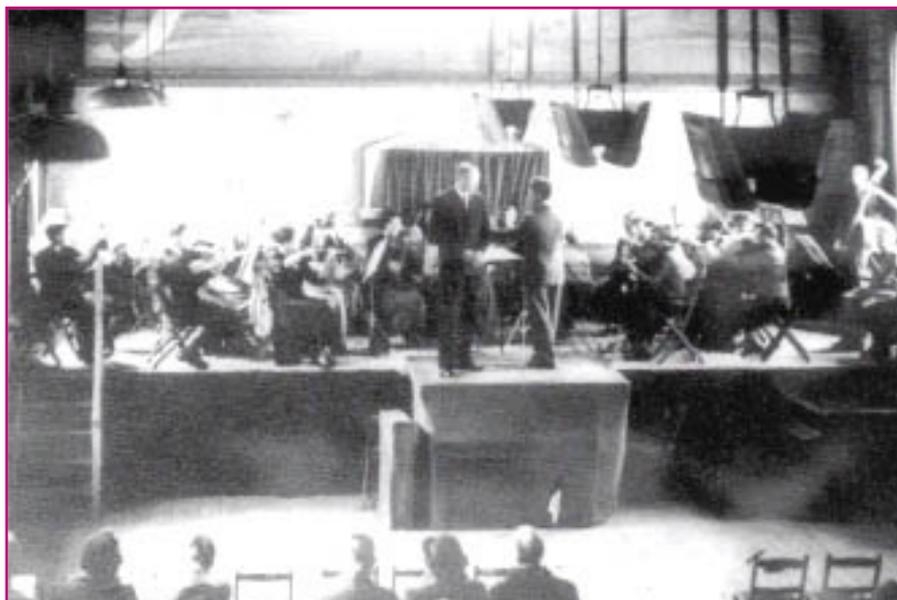
An earlier discovery, in the mid-1920s, was Ivor Gurney's poetry and music. They never actually met, but after Gurney's death in 1937 Gerald began sorting and editing his songs, and over the years he, Joy, Vaughan Williams and Ferguson worked selflessly in the cataloguing some of Gurney's poetry and music, including arranging the publication of over forty of his songs, and orchestrating a few of them, including a magical version of *Sleep*.

By the time he died in 1956, Gerald had a collection of largely English eighteenth century music and books on music that Diana McVeagh said was 'considered the finest of its period assembled privately in England'. Uniquely among researchers and editors, with the NSP, he was actually able to perform the music he was resuscitating. As Joy wrote in her journal:

G's test is always one of performance and without that it is never really possible to say whether a work is dead or alive. So NSP was not only his instrument, but his research tool as well.

Gerald began work at the Ministry of War Transport in July 1941. The night before he left home, he wrote in his diary 'To think that I, who wrote *Proud Songsters*, *Dies Natalis*, *Farewell to Arms*, am about to become a Principal in the Foreign Shipping Relations Department in the Ministry of War Transport. How fantastic - how unbelievably fantastic.' After a few weeks, somewhat to his surprise, he discovered that he could in fact keep the NSP going: he wrote to a friend that 'they're getting quite a good ensemble (for amateurs, most of whom taken singly are pretty poor players), and the regular weekly rehearsal does wonders'.

So by 1942, there was no stopping the achievement. Many of NSP's concerts were in local churches such as Chievely, East Woodhay, Inkpen, Kintbury and Ramsbury, but they also played further away, in village and



The NSP in Hungerford Town Hall, c. 1942

town halls, colleges, schools and corn exchanges, bringing, as Stephen Banfield wrote, 'the classical string repertoire to obscure venues ... that had never heard it before, but also helping to revitalise many a local festival's and school's music-making after wartime dispersals of teachers, choirs, parents, pupils and classes had depressed their community or competitive gatherings'.¹⁷

That year, 1942, in addition to two churches, NSP played again for the Newbury Music Festival (now with 17 choirs, and a marvellous young pianist, Denis Matthews, who joined them in the Bach *D minor Concerto*), at Reading University, in Abingdon's Corn Exchange and The Abbey School in Reading (with the Reading Madrigal Society, who sang Finzi's *Seven Bridges Partsongs*). The soloists that year included Howard Ferguson and Harold Fairhurst, who at that time was the leader of the Bournemouth Municipal

¹⁷ Banfield, *ibid.*, p. 282.

Orchestra (to become the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra after the War), of which my uncle Richard Austin had been the conductor until 1940. The concerts became very special: in 1944 among the soloists were the wonderful tenor Eric Greene and the oboist Leon Goossens; in 1945, Vaughan Williams conducted them, and in 1951 the Newbury Festival programme began with the massed choirs singing my grandfather Frederic Austin's *A Cycle of Traditional Songs*.

The list of soloists who played or sang with the NSP during Gerald's lifetime is astonishing. Among others (and in addition to those already mentioned) were Isobel Baillie; Julian Bream; the incomparable Wilfred Brown (who, incidentally, taught both the Finzi sons when they were schoolboys at Bedales); John Carol Case; the pianist John Constable (who was one of my contemporaries at Leighton Park); Colin Davis (in those days a clarinettist); the violinists Frederick Grinke and Henry Holst; Philip Jones (of the brass ensemble) and Anna Shuttleworth (who played many 18th century cello concertos). Then there was the organist Richard Latham; Kathleen Long; the violinist Yfrah Neaman; the cellist William Pleeth; Bernard Rose (then an organist and later for many years the Director of the Magdalen College Choir at Oxford); my mentor John Russell; Julian Smith (the Winchester schoolmaster who was one of the founders of the St Endellion Festival); Stephen Varcoe; Herbert Sumsion; another cellist, Augustus John's daughter Amaryllis Fleming (who in fact introduced Anna Shuttleworth to the Finzis); David Willcocks (no doubt at the organ), and the Dutch flautist and musicologist Johannes Feltkamp, who said that he greatly enjoyed performing with 'people who arrange, organise and play just for love of art and the fun of playing . . . even if not everything was done with the technical perfection a professional orchestra may command'. Gerald's preferred tenor was Wilfred Brown, and they did *Dies Natalis* together for the first time at NSP's 115th concert, in High Wycombe, in 1952. Then, in 1963, Brown recorded it with Christopher conducting the English Chamber Orchestra.

As Diana McVeagh wrote, 'NSP was now attracting young professionals from outside its area. Students leaving the colleges who needed experience

and a little money (three guineas and expenses) loved playing with them.¹⁸ The flautist Alex Murray, the clarinettist Stephen Trier, James Brown the oboist and the bassoonist William Waterhouse - all in their late teens or early twenties and just out of the Royal College - were the chief wind players at the end of the 1940s and early in the 1950s. At the other end of the scale, so to speak, the rank-and-file players often included non-musicians who were eminent in other professions - surgeons, authors, Oxford professors and the like.

Diana McVeagh went on:

The adolescence of these young people had been dulled and darkened by the war. Ashmansworth came as a revelation to them. From the moment of arrival, to be greeted by 'What's the news? What's been exciting you recently?', the visitor felt the most important person in the world - gathered in, swept up, made a part of whatever was going on. Everyone was welcomed with warmth and encouragement for whatever individual offering he could bring. Gerald and Joy had great sympathy and respect for the half formed ideas of young people, especially if they were misfits in their own home; and were always keen to lend moral support if families were opposed to a life in the arts ... One of the young players remembered his first night there when the Finzis got out *Meet yourself as you really are*, a book of questions designed to reveal personality, which everyone answered with such frankness that he was amazed. Anything and everybody was discussed and at great length. Nobody ever took umbrage. Arguments begun late at night spread over until the next morning's breakfast, always with good humour ... To many of the young players, Gerald became a confidant and a father-figure. Sensitive, shy adults grew deeply attached to him. But there was also a quality about him that could be discomfiting: his penetrating X-ray eyes saw through to everyone's core. People could be dismissed for lack of artistic integrity, and a non-creative person was of no consequence.

18 McVeagh, *ibid*, p. 184.

Such purity was hard to face.¹⁹

After Gerald's death in 1956, Joy wrote to Anna Shuttleworth to explain his illness:

One of his anxieties in these last years was the future of Newbury String Players. He felt so strongly that this sort of music making should and could exist everywhere, and that Newbury String Players, with fifteen years of existence and experience, should continue, even under new influences and conditions. Christopher wants to try and conduct these next three concerts, and I think with his and your musicianship we could maintain our standard of musical vitality despite his technical immaturity. In this way, by continuing, we can best create a living memorial to the faith in the importance of Newbury String Players to the community.

Gerald had conducted 164 concerts, and Christopher, who did indeed take over, would give another 215: an amazing total of 379 concerts over 39 years.

The story of NSP must be unique. No other orchestra can have been founded for such unusual reasons (the onset of a war), and in its early days, when everyone in the country was, in one way or another, worried about how their lives would be affected by the War, it gave infinite spiritual comfort and joy in music-making to both the Finzis and those who played with them, and huge enjoyment to its audiences. I feel very privileged to have had just the slightest possible connection with it.§

[I must pay a warm tribute to Gerald Finzi's biographers, Diana McVeagh and Stephen Banfield. I did no original research for my talk, but merely collected material from their books and various other sources and put it together. Much of that material comes from their splendid biographies, for which I am very grateful.

ML-B]

19 Ibid.

GERALD FINZI:
SEVEN POEMS OF ROBERT BRIDGES OP. 17:
A PERFORMER'S PERSPECTIVE

Gavin Roberts

Gerald Finzi's early years were blighted by loss. He lost his father when he was aged seven and his three brothers in the ensuing First World War; a terrible war in which Finzi also lost an important teacher and mentor in Ernest Farrar, who died on active service. An introspective and shy personality, who was described by Farrar as being 'full of poetry', these personal tragedies only served to enhance the composer's attraction to the sense of the fragility and transience of life found in the poetry of Thomas Hardy, William Wordsworth and Thomas Traherne, in which he immersed himself throughout the 1920s. This was a time when Finzi also became involved in London's busy city life and became part of a composers' set that included Bliss, Rubbra and Howells. Thus, in the early 1930s it is not surprising Finzi chose to set seven of Robert Bridges' vivid and attractive poems as part-songs; poems which appeal both to the composer's thoughtful personality, as well as his love of the English countryside; a countryside to which he retreated for the rest of his life. It should be noted that these years marked a time of greater hope and happiness, as Finzi took up a position as a harmony teacher at the Royal Academy of Music from 1930 to 1933, and in 1933 met and married artist and sculptor Joyce (Joy) Black. This new-found love might well have attracted Finzi to the excitement found in poems such as 'My spirit sang all day', where the name 'Joy' literally inundates the poetry (Finzi's setting said to have been written during their courtship

before their marriage).

Performers always have a choice in responding to the biographical and historical context of any composer's work. Indeed, many eminent performers fervently apply the metier that a musical work stands alone on its own two feet, without outside influence on interpretation. However, with such strong links to specific biographical events and indeed in the special case of musical settings of text, such influences surely provide greater richness for the performers, in terms of their ownership over the words that they sing. Certainly, I have found that singers, on discovering the 'Joy' personal connection in *My spirit sang all day* (surely one of Finzi's most popular short choral works), can find a new exuberance in their investment of the text, in knowing what this name meant to the composer. And of course, Finzi provides a special case, as a composer whose musical response to poetry is always so wonderfully natural; mostly syllabic, with pitch and rhythm seemingly unobtrusive to the poetic meaning, while at the same time giving the meaning of the text a unique Finzian musical flavour.

As someone who spends the larger proportion of his professional life working as a pianist with opera and song singers, and indeed actors, I am used to working specifically on the communicative power of texts filtered through the musical gauze of composers. Thus, I have always been fascinated by how one might bring such learning processes to my work with choirs. Is there something about the way that opera singers and actors work with text in such a deep and detailed way that can be brought to the choir rehearsal? Choirs often work in a different way when approaching text, with focus on diction, ensemble and tuning preoccupying the rehearsal room. Ironically, I find that such a focus is often at the expense of communicative meaning, as when the breath is taken for each phrase, rarely does one glean how the performers *feel* about what they sing, in the way one would expect from a soloist. Perhaps, this should not matter. On speaking to conductor colleagues, some tell me that the music, through its harmony, rhythm, pitch, dynamics and articulation, does all the work. Of course, solo singers and actors have usually committed their text to memory, and have done important work

on characterisation, poetic meaning and structure, language, syntax and so on, even before working on musical aspects of a song or aria. Thus, it has become my view that such responsibilities might rest on the shoulders of the conductor, in leading groups both large and small through texted music, and especially poetic settings. The problem is perhaps more acute for choirs, as the time invested in the music is often much shorter than would be the case for a solo singer who has committed a song to memory; this is certainly true of my church choir, who have to sight-read everything an hour before each performance. Finzi's choral music provides the perfect case for such a text-led approach, as his choral vocal writing is so akin to that of his solo songs, namely largely syllabic with speech-like rhythmic shapes. In general, the textures of his Bridges part-songs are largely homophonic, allowing the ensemble to shape the text in a unified way. When Finzi employs counterpoint, the parts often mirror rhythmic shapes, the clarity of text never compromised, as one part is often held suspended as another either repeats or emphasises the same text.

Conductor Paul Spicer is clearly a musician who takes such matters seriously, and in his excellent article on recording these part-songs with his Finzi Singers (*The Clock of the Years* ed. Rolf Jordan), he points out that 'it is crucially important to think oneself into the world of the touchingly naïve words. The simple text, if taken seriously, can regain its almost childlike innocence'. Such an approach to text is something I hear frequently taught in institutions where I work, such as the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, always in an effort to avoid sentimentality at all costs, ensuring the language of the poetry is taken seriously as part of the music. So, how might one allow the singers of an ensemble to engage more deeply with Finzi's settings of Robert Bridges' poetry, bearing in mind the approach needs to be efficient and practicable within a tight rehearsal schedule? To take Finzi's *I praise the tender flower* as an initial example, one might allocate time to speaking text as a group, to glean the sense of the three contrasting stanzas. As Finzi's rhythm, pitches and other markings become incorporated into the learning process (noting Finzi's peculiarly English way of setting strong-

weak syllables on long-short rhythms, such as in 'flower' in the poem's first line), this exercise might include techniques I have witnessed actors practising, such as the 'embodiment of text', where the speakers literally try to 'be' each word as they speak. Other methods to engage with text on a local level are to allow the meaning of the 'doing' words (mainly verbs and adjectives) to influence the colour of the voice, as well as allow the nouns to 'land' firmly. Finzi's markings are always a great help in this regard. What emotive qualities can be inferred from the *tenuto* marking on 'And made the winter gay' and the *marcato* at the top of a long crescendo on 'Its loveliness contented' Of course, this is all part of a learning process, and musicians are renowned for wanting to set the way they will sing the performance in the rehearsal room. Once it becomes clear that these techniques are merely a learning process to embed the meaning poetry and music in the body on a local word-focussed level, one can 'zoom out' more easily to reflect on more general issues of how to contrast the three stanzas as an emotional journey. The role of the conductor can start to be less of a metronome and more a theatre director who influences the way the breath is taken in relation to the emotive qualities of the music. It is my experience that this can allow musical issues of diction, tempo, tuning, ensemble, etc. to fall into place; for without communication, these are all literally meaningless. In the end, the composer's music is the flesh on the poem which he initially read and discovered, and if one keeps looking closely enough in the score, one can find everything one needs to know!

I praise the tender flower throws up many other issues also pertinent to the whole set, and indeed ensemble singing in general. The first four lines of Bridges' first two stanzas are one long sentence, and indeed Finzi, who appears to be always attentive to exact note durations, writes not a single rest (except for the altos after 'garden bower'). Even if a choir decides to breathe at some point during these sentences, Finzi's and Bridges' mutual desire to see the sense through as one thought can influence the collective direction a choir takes. Incidentally, another fine example of such a 'breathing gauntlet' being thrown to the choir is in *My spirit sang all day* which is often heard with

the note lengths of each phrase shortened, often by as much as a crotchet taken out of Finzi's final note lengths. This most popular of Finzi's part-songs I first came to know as a listener, so I was intrigued to discover that on the page Finzi's excitement seems more breathless and excited than I had been used to hearing. Indeed, he never appears to allow a moment's pause between each thought. I have tried this with choirs almost as an endless stream of consciousness, almost as if without a breath from start to finish (excepting the few moments where Finzi writes a rest!). Indeed, with larger groups, it can be fun to experiment with 'staggering' where gaps between the phrases can be papered over. Again, the context and rehearsal schedule of the group can dictate how much such parameters need to be 'nailed down' by the conductor, and how much experimentation can exist in the rehearsal room. Certainly, actors learn never to say the same phrase exactly the same way in subsequent readings, so musicians giving themselves permission to be flexible in the same way, within the more restricted parameters (or I should say the *inspiring direction* of a composer) of the musical score is surely worth trying, especially when the composer seems to be trying to tell us something *through* that score.

Finzi's largely syllabic and homophonic style is often punctuated by light counterpoint, where one part echoes the text of another; something which can often be exploited by the ensemble to accentuate these repetitions in the poem. Incidentally, Finzi never repeats a word within a single voice part, so these moments are suitable for discovering a dialogue between the parts. The final exquisite phrase of *I praise the tender flower* ('So in my song I bind them') is one which often causes difficulties for singers in sustaining a crescendo and maintaining the full length of notes which squeeze out Finzi's searing dissonances; the sopranos and tenors working in a team versus the altos and basses. Careful practice of this dialogue in these separate parts should help the ensemble surmount this challenge: it's well worth it! Clarity of text in moments of busier counterpoint can also be challenging. In *I have loved flowers that fade* the phrases 'Notes, with that pulse of fire proclaim the spirit's delight' and 'fly with delight, fly hence' may need careful rehearsal

of dialogue between the parts to ensure the sentence is still gleanable within the texture. Contrastingly in *Haste on, my joys* the unusually expansive and polyphonic texture at 'Were but your rare gifts longer mine, / Ye scarce would win my love' is typical of the kind of choral texture where singers must work hard as a team to get the sense of the whole sentence across; meaning can get lost in the enthusiasm to let vocal tone triumph over text, especially in a large acoustic. Finzi marks all five parts at *mezzo forte*, yet some kind of profiling between the parts based on the important words of the text 'landing' effectively might influence the way it is sung. Of course, listening to each other as a group is crucial here.

The second poem *I have loved flowers that fade* dispenses with the basses, meaning it is less often performed. However, when performed as a complete set of part-songs, it is all too easy to slip back into the same tempo as the first poem. Finzi's music nearly always includes metronome marks, and the increase from crotchet = c.58 to c.72 is apt for this more vivid paean to life before the *tranquillo* at 'Then die, and are nowhere', which might need a relaxing of tempo to enable time for the expressive rising and falling intervals, carefully marked with 'hairpins' like as if sighing through the poetry. Having said that, Finzi's metronome marks for *Clear and gentle stream* and *Nightingales* are identical (crotchet=c.63); both settings are also largely soft, excepting the latter's exuberant depiction of the dawn at the end. Here, both Finzi and the poetry are of great help in avoiding musical monotony. Traversing from the comfortable flowing liquid lines of the former to the hushed, dreamlike excitement of the latter, Finzi points us in the direction of a new, more excited world. Although at the same tempo, a real and deep inhabiting of the text at the moment the breath is taken can allow both performer and listener to experience this new world. Soft singing takes even greater energy and focus than loud singing; the 'ppp' at 'where are those starry woods?' to be seized as a rare opportunity to deliver an important question rather than an inhibiting instruction.

Nightingales and *Wherefore tonight so full of care* are two of the most difficult settings for a group to bring off in a unified way. Both largely homophonic

and soft (although both with a loud ending), with great detail in Finzi's rhythm and dynamics, they remind me of a 'penny drop' moment I had as a student at the Guildhall School in a coaching session with the ever-inspiring mezzo-soprano Sarah Walker, who pointed out that composers can only ever write a rhythm as close to the words as they deem possible. Words by their very nature are all different shapes and sizes; some with plenty of tasty consonants, and some being less important in the structure of the sentence, yet all important to be heard! This is especially worth remembering when composers write equal length notes in quick succession; the shape of the text might be thought of as fitting into the jacket of the composer's rhythms, but with room for manoeuvre on a local level, rather like different shaped people making room for each other on a row of identically shaped seats on a tube train! Take 'barren are those mountains' from the second stanza of *Nightingales* written as a string of semiquavers, which if sung precisely and robotically will actually lose clarity of text. As with his regular use of triplets (in various guises) within simple meters (examples can be found throughout these part-songs), Finzi seems to treat such rhythms as lilting propellers to the next important part of the sentence. Sadly, the opposite effect can easily occur in the rehearsal room as the reading of more difficult rhythms can actually cause a labouring of the text instead.

I have worked on these part-songs (as a whole group or on selections), with smaller groups of amateurs, as well as professionals, one recent memorable experience being with a Chamber Choir the 2018 Dartington Summer School, where various members professed to having become Robert Bridges enthusiasts during the week of work we undertook. Indeed, there seems something suitably domestic about unaccompanied part-songs that lends itself to smaller groups (although I have heard plenty of successful renditions of *My spirit sang all day* from large choirs). Needless to say, thanks to Finzi's unique poetic approach, these part-songs are a wonderful vehicle for any group, large or small, to learn to engage with poetry through the music, in that order, for without the former the latter would never have existed! §

KENNETH LEIGHTON (1929–1988)
RESEARCH INTO HIS MUSICAL STYLE

Tom Coxhead

Tom Coxhead writes about his current post-graduate research into
Kenneth Leighton's mass settings.

During my second year as an undergraduate at Durham, I worked on a project trying to make the case for classifying many British composers of the early twentieth century as deserving of the term 'modern'. Britain does seem to foster an unusually hostile reception towards its native composers and so often modernism is portrayed as the domain of continental Europe, a view that seems to validate the belief that British music is not worth bothering with. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this generalisation and the tide shows signs of turning; nonetheless my academic interests are still concerned with these issues. I particularly focussed on Herbert Howells for this project and during a conversation with Paul Spicer he posited the idea of Kenneth Leighton as Howells' 'natural successor'.¹ Leighton has suffered the same fate as many English composers in receiving little attention from concert halls and festivals. Only a handful of his works are maintained by our choral foundations. This tacit relegation to a mere 'church-music composer' overlooks a significant output of high-quality orchestral music including three symphonies and a handful of concertos. This really has proven one of the key inspirations for studying Leighton's music; whilst my thesis is chiefly concerned with the ten mass settings Leighton wrote, it is intended to understand them within the wider frame of all his compositions (not just choral) as well as exploring his music in the canon of English music in the

1 Spicer, Paul (2014). Interview with author. Durham.

add chart lengthways

twentieth century. By focusing on the ten mass settings, it allows an in-depth exploration of Leighton's style and his response to similar texts and also appreciation of these neglected works.

The table on the next page identifies the ten mass settings, the reason for their composition, and performance details.

Kenneth Leighton was one of the most distinct and original voices in the mid-twentieth century. He was also a gifted pianist and often gave performances of his own works. Leighton always described himself as a Yorkshire composer, his music embodying the regional trait of straightforwardness (or better, directness). He was also a considerable figure as a teacher, holding the Reid Professorship in Music at the University of Edinburgh from 1970 until his early death in 1988, during which time several of today's composers studied with him, including James MacMillan. He enjoyed composing in a cottage on the Isle of Arran and would frequently take his dogs for long walks in the Scottish countryside, which would give him the space to work out a tricky corner of an ongoing project. Some publications have made the mistake to assume that Leighton himself was Scottish! His love of Palestrina and Bach were well-known to his peers and pupils alike. Leighton's friendship with Finzi, by whom he was encouraged considerably, developed after the second world war.

Born in Wakefield in 1929 to Thomas and Florence Leighton, his upbringing was unlikely for a major British composer. Leighton grew up in a modest terraced house on Denstone Street and whilst his parents appreciated music, they were not musicians themselves. Finzi visited Denstone Street in 1953 and was struck by the unassuming 'back-to-back four roomed house in a cobbled street'.² The family home was a supportive and stable environment and, if a little bemused by his genius, Leighton's parents encouraged their young son. Leighton's father and brother both sang in the choir at Holy Trinity as did Leighton until 1938 when he was admitted as a chorister at Wakefield Cathedral. This is likely to have been when Leighton's initial formal musical education began. The choir at Wakefield under Newell 'Tosh'

² McVeagh, Diana (2005). *Gerald Finzi His Life and Music*. Boydell Press, Woodbridge. p.215

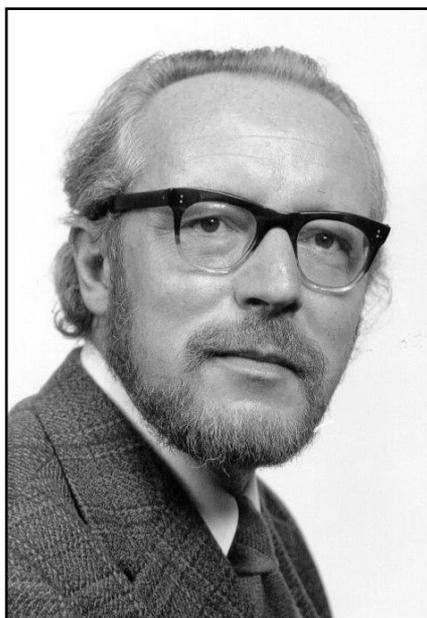
Wallbank managed a diverse repertoire and Leighton recalled coming across not only Stanford et al but a fair amount of Elizabethan music and even carols by Peter Warlock and Benjamin Britten. It is not clear who provided Leighton with his first music lessons but he was already playing the piano in school assemblies at Holy Trinity Boys' School, which he attended between 1937 and 1940, and it is evident that he possessed an innate musical ability. Leighton subsequently went to Queen Elizabeth Grammar School (QEGS) on a scholarship where he excelled in Latin as well as music. One of his masters at QEGS, Ronald Chapman, introduced him to much modern music including Stravinsky and Bartok. It is also where Leighton first became aware of Serialism and the Second Viennese School.

Leighton began writing down music as a means to record his improvisations but he soon became interested in the art of composition itself. Perhaps what is most impressive with the juvenilia is the evident self-discipline. Even in his teenage years, Leighton studiously works through exercises in two and three parts and hones his technical skill. Leighton kept a composition book (in fact he had three in various states of completion) and the earliest entries start at 1945. His compositions are exclusively for solo piano or songs for voice and piano accompaniment in the first few years. These early works, particularly those for the piano, do demonstrate key hallmarks of Leighton's mature style (a rather free approach to harmony and elements of modality) but they also show the greater impression of the composers who influenced him. The early songs, which have not been published, mostly readily show the impressions of Vaughan Williams, Quilter and Parry. Some are guilty of being pastiche but it can be forgiven for a young composer still finding his voice. The songs also highlight Leighton's interest in literature. His choice of poetry is diverse and he shows a nuanced understanding in his text-setting. So perhaps it is not completely surprising that it was Classics not Music for which Leighton was awarded a state scholarship (upgraded to a Hastings Scholarship) to The Queen's College, Oxford in 1947.

The context of Leighton's early life is significant considering that the Stanford-taught generation was very much at its height and that major

elements of Leighton's mature compositional style are already present in his early works, even before he arrived in Oxford. He could hardly be described as a product of the establishment, yet he was able to easily gain its respect. Leighton was by all accounts an affable man and certainly did not appear to have the chip-on-the-shoulder that Elgar had about his background. By going to Oxford, Leighton may have become part of the musical establishment, but so much of his style was formed already it would be hard to say he was necessarily a product of Oxford: the level of originality was honed rather than created by his experiences. He had already had his *Sonatina No. 1* for piano published.

Leighton took full advantage of the extra-curricular musical activities at Oxford. He was an active member of the College's Eglesfield Music Society and he continued to compose. Bernard Rose, who was Director of Music at the College, took a keen interest in Leighton's music and convinced him to take the Music trips. Rose was highly active in getting performances for Leighton's music and he even performed some of Leighton's songs himself with the composer at the piano. It was Rose who sent a score of Leighton's *Symphony for Strings* (Opus 3) to Finzi in 1949. Leighton had recently discovered Finzi's song settings and found them incredibly rewarding and inspiring. Finzi was evidently impressed enough with *Symphony for Strings* to invite Leighton to hear the Newbury String Players (NSP) rehearse the work. This was a watershed moment for Leighton. He had not before experienced the same quality of players perform a work of his before and he appreciated the



sensitivity of Finzi's direction and advice.³ Finzi would have inevitably been drawn to Leighton's well-developed handling of contrapuntal textures and linear approach to composition. Leighton was still studying Classics when he met Finzi and their extensive knowledge and love of literature was almost certainly a bolster to their friendship. Leighton's string-writing shares many characteristics of Finzi's, an influence that pervades even in his later works. Leighton wrote his suite *Veris Gratia* (Opus 9) in 1950 and dedicated it to Finzi and the NSP. It was premièred with Jacqueline du Pre playing the solo cello part .

It is slightly surprising considering Leighton's cathedral training that it was only in 1948 that he wrote his first choral music. The *Three Carols* of that year included the now well-loved setting of the *Coventry Carol*, which Leighton later included in his Opus 25 set of *Three Carols*, the other two from 1948 (*The Seven Joys of Mary* and *Sleep, Holy Babe*) are assured but less inspired compositions. In 1949 Leighton penned a *Missa Brevis* (following the 1662 BCP order for Holy Communion) that seems to take Harold Darke's *Communion Service in F* as its model and a *Pater Noster*. Again, both of these are rather unadventurous and, although displaying his ability to compose singable and interesting parts, unrelentingly homophonic. His development is much more discernible in his non-choral music. Evidently Leighton did not perceive his career as a composer to be one focussed on church music and after 1960 (with only one or two exceptions) all of his choral output is commissioned.

In 1951, as Leighton's studies at Oxford drew to a close, Rose encouraged him to apply for the Mendelssohn scholarship which he won and it allowed him to study with Goffredo Petrassi in Rome. Lessons with Petrassi saw more Serialism enter Leighton's music (although he never fully embraced Serialist principles) and a greater degree of vertical harmonic dissonance. Returning from Rome, Leighton had essentially obtained all the elements of his mature style. By this point, Leighton was receiving London performances of his music which Finzi continued to attend when he could, along with

³ Leighton's 'Memories of Finzi' is available on the Finzi Trust website: <https://www.geraldfinzi.org/memories-of-gerald-finzi---kenneth-leighton.html>

Ralph Vaughan Williams too.

Concerning the music itself, understanding that much of Leighton's writing is instinctive and nominally improvisatory is significant. Leighton also worked bar by bar, his scores clearly demonstrating that his method for composing was to work through a piece, not to stitch disparate sketches together. This method of construction does bring about a much more literal meaning to the phrase 'through-composed'. Very few works end in the same key (or even a related one) that they start in. As my work is chiefly analytical, Leighton's music can be rather problematic to find a suitable way of explaining what is going on: quite often it can feel like the music does what it does because 'it sounds like Leighton'! The fact that his harmony is broadly 'non-functional' (that is to say not of the traditional dominant-tonic kind of harmony where chords hold different 'functions') and that the tonal plots of his music are not conventional makes the usual prose commenting on modulations and key changes quite meaningless. What becomes apparent when trying to unpick Leighton's harmonic style is the importance of voice-leading and that in fact the harmony is a product of it. The Neo-Riemannian school of analysis has proved the best fit for exploring Leighton's harmonic language, particularly Richard Cohn's treatises.⁴ It provides suitable terminology for relating tonics (and their consequent triads) that do not bear any meaningful relationship with Roman numeral analysis, i.e. beyond dominants, sub-dominants etc., to each other. It is also to say that Leighton's music largely eschews traditional cadences.

There are two observable styles or groups into which Leighton's works fall. The first is what I would predominantly attribute to his orchestral music and most clearly demonstrates Leighton's place in the canon of English orchestral composers. Here there are the essential English elements of Elgar as well as Vaughan Williams; in crude terms, one might describe it as somewhere between Finzi and Britten, and it might be termed his 'orchestral' or 'lyrical' style. The second style is characterised by its polyphonic texture. This style is the one most are probably familiar with, as it seems to

4 Cohn, Richard (2000). *Audacious Euphony*. OUP

particularly belong to the keyboard and choral music. It exhibits the spiky qualities displayed in some of Leighton's best-known music such as *Let all the world* (1965) and the *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis* (1959) written for Magdalen College, Oxford. Of course, these two particular ways of writing do not exist entirely isolated from each other and there are several examples of switching between the two. *The Mass* (Opus 44) for double choir constantly begins phrases in Leighton's polyphonic style but then adopts the 'orchestral' once all eight of the voices have entered the texture. The nature of the polyphonic style requires there to be something of a dominant-tonic framework in order to be convincing. The fugally-necessary melodic fourth is also present, the qualities of which make life a little easier for singers as it means the music does not exhibit quite such extreme tonal plots. Nonetheless, Leighton is able to create harsh textures but not do this at the expense of a singable line. Perhaps the best example of the 'orchestral' style in his choral music is in the setting of Phineas Fletcher's poem, *Drop, drop slow tears* that ends his cantata written for David Lumsden and the choir of New College, Oxford, (Opus 38, 1961). This is one of the few works Leighton wrote in one sitting. Its tonal plot reads a like a list of keys chosen at random. The setting of the first verse is: C-sharp minor, C Lydian, A major, F Lydian, D major/minor, B-flat Lydian, E-flat major. Neo-Riemannian analysis gives us useful handles for some of the transitions, particularly when the bass moves by a third. The creation of these dramatic tonal shifts are, as always, made up by alto, tenor and bass parts that are predominantly made up of small intervals, seconds and thirds. Stepwise contrary-motion, particularly between the soprano and the bass, signals the most dramatic of these.

Substitute minor modes:

Add music

Add music

Modality is also a prominent feature of Leighton's works. Whilst used less discriminately in Leighton's earlier pieces, often giving rise to 'synthetic' or invented modes, the prominence of the Lydian (in place of the major) and the Phrygian and Locrian (in place of the minor) modes defines much of the compositional character. Within these Old Church modes, Leighton writes almost entirely diatonically. The instability of the modal scales also provides much scope for unorthodox modulations and tonal shifts and the occasional mixing of modes provides enough chromatic interest. The Lydian mode, for example, has a raised fourth scale degree, which has the effect of trapping the music in the ephemeral space of traditional harmony during a tonic to dominant modulation. This often adds to the exciting and energetic effect of Leighton's works particular when combined with the composer's use of dance-rhythms and ostinato.

My aims with this thesis are, of course, not merely for analysis' sake but to instigate a critical discussion of Leighton's compositions, the result of which would be greater interest and enthusiasm for a greater portion of his work. I hope that by engaging with the harmony in particular, it is possible to highlight the quality and originality of Leighton's compositional voice. In choosing to focus on the ten mass settings, I have not been able to explore

Leighton's formal organisation and structure of his compositions in great detail. His strong point as a choral and vocal composer is as a responsive text-setter and in managing to preserve a strong sense of the natural speech-rhythms. I hope my work might encourage others to explore the orchestral or chamber music in similar detail and possibly elucidate areas that my research has not allowed me to focus on. §

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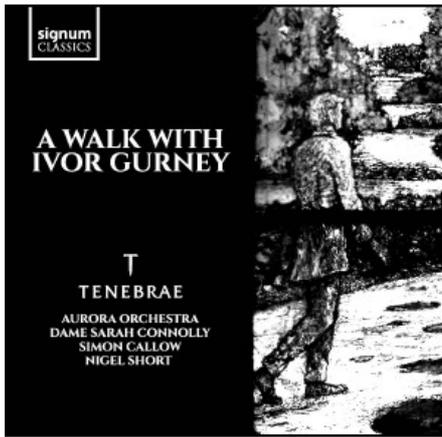
REVIEW: A WALK WITH IVOR GURNEY

Martin Bussey

Dame Sarah Connolly (mezzo soprano)
Simon Callow (reader)
Tenebrae
Aurora Orchestra
Nigel Short (conductor)
Signum Classics SIGCD557

I admit to approaching this double CD with mixed feelings. I heard Sarah Connolly's compelling performance of *By a Bierside* on Radio 3 and was hooked. When I unwrapped the CDs themselves I became slightly dubious about the rationale behind the disc. My doubts disappeared largely as I listened but they are worth rehearsing, if only to accentuate along the way what I think are some very positive attributes of this project.

Ivor Gurney has now become a significant figure in the English cultural tradition but for as many reasons as he has followers. For some he is an icon of World War I, amongst many other cultural figures, but distinctive because of the way in which the impact of war on Gurney lasted for so many years after (and I'm avoiding discussion here regarding pre-war signs of mental ill health). For others he is a poetic figure, gradually gaining significance as more and more of his writing is published. For many reading this review, he is a musical figure of great interest, with more and more music becoming available and performed. This disc illustrates that point in providing another recording of the long-unperformed anthem, *Since I believe in God the Father Almighty* to set alongside that by The Sixteen (on their *Poetry in Music* CD on CORO) and that by Gloucester Cathedral Choir (on PRIORY). The danger is that we make Gurney into what we want him to be or judge him by other's



standards. We have to be realistic in admitting that even Gurney's friends were susceptible to this. Although, when deciding which of Gurney's manuscripts were worth preserving in published form, Finzi showed a clear awareness of the danger of pre-judging Gurney's quality in a letter to Marion Scott in 1937: '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 ... have a curious coherence about them somewhere'.

A similar danger lurks when placing Gurney in the context of his musical friends and known influences. In the case of this CD, this means Vaughan Williams, Howells and, as an orchestrator, Finzi. The danger is that we read in connections that we want to find. The CD surrounds three of Gurney's songs, powerfully sung by Sarah Connolly, and the anthem, with various orchestral and choral works by Vaughan Williams and Howells. Some connections are obvious. The first disc begins with *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and Philip Lancaster's CD notes recount the impact the first performance of the work had on Gurney and Howells. On the second disc, Vaughan Williams' *Oxford Elegy*, which sets Matthew Arnold's poem remembering the lost but seemingly still present *Scholar Gipsy*, is posited as a reflection of Vaughan Williams' regret for those lost in war; by the time of writing (1947), this meant two world wars. This was a new idea to me (Philip Lancaster quotes Michael Kennedy as the source, so it deserves careful consideration). It seems hard to weld a mid-nineteenth century poem onto the traumas of the twentieth century in such an obvious connection, and one where the 'Oxford' or scholar element is absent. Yet I confess that, listening to the performance, the always moving choral passage 'Why faintest thou' which comes very near the end of the work, took on an even

greater poignancy in this suggested context. I have to be honest, however and say that I feel the 'connection' between Gurney and Vaughan Williams begins to lose impetus as one reaches the end of the second CD. Even the admirable CD notes falter in drawing any real connection between Gurney and the last two Vaughan Williams pieces, *Valiant for Truth* and *Lord thou hast been our refuge*.

The raison d'être for the CD's title lies with the entirely original view of Gurney that Judith Bingham presents in her work of the same name. As so often with this composer the view is unexpected and captivating. Judith Bingham takes texts from Gurney's poetry as fragments, some substantial, and weaves them around two epitaphs for Roman soldiers found in Gloucestershire. The resonances between old and contemporary are common in late nineteenth and early twentieth century poetry (Philip Lancaster points to Housman) and are to be found in Gurney's own poems, such as *Brown Earth Look*. Here, Gurney describes the Romans as 'quiet comrades and ponderers'. Judith Bingham's handling is simple in structure (not harmonically!) but assured and highly effective. The powerful rendition of the solo mezzo part by Sarah Connolly places Gurney's texts, often about landscape, centre stage. These are sung mostly against wordless soprano and alto chord-clusters or undulating chords as a backdrop. The Roman epitaphs are presented by the tenor and bass voices, with a particularly memorable use of low basses, and skilful transitions between the two groups. This use of texture to structure the work leads to the climax where all three 'groups' join together. The solo vocal line is demanding, angular at times but in a lyrical context and demands, and receives, careful colouring to reflect Gurney's words. The choral harmonies are exceptionally well judged and chosen. They are dissonant at times but always lean, with little unnecessary doubling, as far as the ear can tell.

Two CDs with a mixture of genres are challenging to sustain in terms of performance as well as thematically. The performances are of high quality, enabling the individual listener to decide what he or she enjoys most on the grounds of stylistic approach rather than because any tracks are 'better' than others. Though I admit I will return to Sarah Connolly again and again! One

of the distinctive aspects of the discs is hearing a woman's voice in repertoire so much more usually associated with male voices. This has been done before, by Janet Baker and Susan Bickley, to name but two singers, and particularly effective here is the mezzo timbre against the orchestrations by Howells and Finzi. There is also the element, pertinent to the earlier discussion, that this removes the listener from any concept of Gurney as 'that poor man'. The female voice transcends Gurney's biographical details, which can so easily stand in the way of appreciating him purely as a creative spirit.

The orchestral playing by the Aurora Orchestra is assured and particularly effective in *An Oxford Elegy*, making this recording a welcome champion for an underperformed piece. Although not all groups can afford to hire Simon Callow as the clear and intelligent narrator. The Vaughan Williams *Fantasia* is hard to record afresh because there are myriad competitors. There's nothing to fault but I would have enjoyed more flexibility in places, perhaps less driven tempi, and more of the generous acoustic which appears on track two for the Howells anthem. Tenebrae is a group which upholds the highest standards. For my ears they are perfect for the precision in ensemble and tuning demanded by the triadic sections and sudden modulations of Vaughan Williams' *Valiant for Truth*, which is clear and full of impact. This makes them ideal also for *An Oxford Elegy* which is demanding in similar ways and by no means a gentle pastoral amble. Their performance of *Since I believe in God the Father Almighty* merges the sounds of the two four-part choirs to achieve the full impact of Gurney's shifting harmonies as the two groups interweave: in this respect they highlight Gurney's textural shifts more effectively than The Sixteen. Their performance of Howells' *Like as the hart* is very sustained (within a dangerously slow tempo) and contains a warmth this listener has sometimes found lacking in other recordings by the group.

So, two discs with much to enjoy and definitely recommended. What you feel at the end of your walk with Gurney will very much depend on your personal response to an interesting though by no means clear-cut concept. §

REVIEW: COME TO ME IN MY DREAMS

Matt Pope

Come To Me In My Dreams

Dame Sarah Connolly (mezzo soprano)

Joseph Middleton (piano)

Chandos: CHAN 10944

In July last year, two of Britain's most distinguished recitalists collaborated on a Record whose title *Come to Me in My Dreams*, came with a claim to present '120 years of Song from the Royal College of Music'. With highly acclaimed pianist and accompanist Joseph Middleton, Sarah Connolly traces the song-writing tradition of her alma-mater from as early as original staff members Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford. More time is given to the works of their progeny: familiar masters of the style, with their teachers and students who have lost the renown they knew in their lifetimes and whose significance within the tradition here finds some recognition. The album's last four songs cover a vast span of time, with Michael Tippett's 1961 cycle, *Songs for Ariel*, and Mark Anthony-Turnage's *Farewell*, which he wrote for the album just last year.

Connolly deserves some credit for offering an abridged musical history of our second oldest school of music, but, most crucially, the record is exceptionally beautiful. Some works are more suited to casual listening and like to need fewer repetitions than they take, but all are worth attending to for the tender care that has yielded performances as astonishingly sensitive as these.

The tour begins not with Stanford, but one of his students. Muriel Herbert penned *The Lost Nightingale* around 1939. It is one of two pieces on

the album which begin with Connolly's voice alone, and so the first music we hear is the direct expression of poetry. Those who have seen Connolly act will be unsurprised at how quickly and authentically she assumes the roles of lover and philosopher poet.

Before we make it to the head of this collegial table to find Parry and his co-founder Stanford, each accepting a piece in homage to their rank, we meet with their eternally precocious successor Benjamin Britten, whose song-cycle *A Charm of Lullabies* (1947) precedes and outperforms the work of his ancestors.

Here is Connolly at her most versatile. Her heart-wrought vibrato ripples into rare and brief moments of tranquility. Which imagined infant could not but confound their governess' command to sleep? *A Charm* might frighten one upstairs, but the last of the set would hold child and adult transfixed, adding or removing the years respectively.

Appended to this cycle are two of the songs originally sketched for it, here on record for the first time. Between Britten's official cycle and his omissions from it are works by various composers that further jumble the timeline. The album does close with its most recent work: still living composer Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Farewell*, which, in Connolly's words, brings 'the programme up to the present day'. One feels this may have been possible without commissioning a new piece; fellow alumnus Michael Finnissy has written plenty of vocal music fit for that purpose.

On what grounds were songs like Finnissy's excluded? And on what merit did others make the cut? Is *Farewell* the looked for proof that current composers are still burning with the essence of their teachers' and their teachers' teachers' (tonal) lyricism? In rejecting the more tonally ambiguous works of the last 60 years, this account of '120 Years of Song' seems to imply that the avant-garde is an aberration. It is the composers who carry the old-flame forth while gripping the line back to Britten who are the real inheritors of a lyrical, resilient, perhaps quintessentially English style. One wonders how Chandos could be so careless on a record which is in all other aspects remarkably sincere. The subtitle '120 Years of Song' starts to lose credibility.

But then, we suspect this concerns the performers no more than it does us.

Come to Me in My Dreams is not the comprehensive catalogue that its backcover might have us believe. It is instead a personal collection and a testimony to the college where Sarah Connolly enjoyed being 'sprawled among sheets of music.' Its order is more than mere chronology, and its expression almost too direct to maintain academic distance. There is far more, too, to say of Joseph Middleton, whose expansive but measured sense of rubato seems in every case to evince an anticipatory skill so refined he must by now instinctively notice detail others would consider beyond observation.

The period of study lends itself to obscurity by way of nostalgia. British identity was not so controversial while Gurney fought his way to madness in the trenches.

Yet here is no performance that relies on a seductive association with, and feeling for, a simpler, more sincere, even heroic, age. Connolly and Middleton do not only take us back; with numinous power they bring forward old thoughts to be thought again. But this timelessness is so much the inadvertent consequence of the album's beauty. If it is timeless, or important for whatever reason, it was, and will always be, beautiful first. §

REVIEW : JOHN JOUBERT

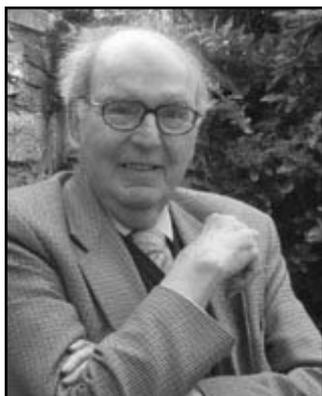
Martin Bussey

Piano Concerto Op. 25 (1958)
Symphony No. 3 Op. 178 (2014-17) on
themes from the opera *Jane Eyre*
Martin Jones (piano)
BBC National Orchestra of Wales
William Boughton (conductor)
Lyrita SRCD367

Piano Concerto

The role of the concerto in the twentieth century, once the concept of virtuosity had become outplayed, which one might date from the death of Rachmaninov in the 1940s, is an interesting one. By this stage the virtuosity of performers was something assumed rather than being something that was necessarily the primary focus of a barnstorming musical work. Musical and structural integrity seem to have become much more significant, particularly to British composers; and one might date this a lot further back, to Elgar's Cello Concerto. Joubert's Piano Concerto certainly exhibits these characteristics in the most positive manner, possessed of a musical coherence that has stood the test of time well. In this respect the work sits alongside concertos of contemporaries such as William Mathias and, in some respects, Finzi's concertante works. Newcomers to Joubert's Piano Concerto will find it sits well as a follow-on from the Naxos disc of British Piano Concertos which includes works by Alec Rowley and others.

This Lyrita disc, with the solo part played with great clarity by Martin



Jones, is a welcome opportunity to hear a well-paced piece where musical structure plots an emotional path which is stimulating and rewarding. In this respect, the work exemplifies Joubert's aim as quoted in the sleeve notes: 'communication is important to me. I want to be understood, enjoyed and used. I do not want to live in the enclosed and artificial world of "Contemporary Music"'. These thoughts may resonate with enthusiasts for Finzi's music also.

The first movement is characterized by rhythmic insistence throughout, often in the form of repeated note figures, particularly a four-note motif whose rhythm informs most ideas in the movement. This well-knit thematic approach gives continuity and reassurance to anyone coming to the work for the first time. The structure of the movement essentially leads, emotionally, to a passage reminiscent of Rachmaninov which occurs around a third of the way through and recurs later. Both passages form effective climaxes in what is a well-proportioned structure which owes much to traditional sonata forms.

The second movement is characterized by effective chamber music scoring at the start, particularly attractive in its use of woodwind, especially the bassoon. The varied orchestral palette of colours is a strength of the work as a whole, providing much variety and interest. This second movement has a more philosophical, perhaps reflective feel after the driven first movement. Here, the climax comes midway through the movement, forming the most dissonant section of the work so far. Joubert gives brass and horns their head before the more reflective style returns. The movement ends with a brief look back at the more dissonant writing before the tranquil opening returns.

The final, third movement opens with cadenza-like flourishes from the piano focused on rapid repeated notes and trills, although this is untypical of the work as a whole, which eschews virtuosity for its own sake. An allegro ensues, where repeated-note ideas take centre-stage again. Here they

are played mainly as a backdrop to piano passage work, and the ideas are, perhaps, less incisive rhythmically than those in earlier movements. Perhaps also, some of the imitative and sequential writing is a little predictable. There are, however, some interesting combinations and workings out of ideas mid-movement and a build-up of effective dissonances akin to the middle of the second movement. This is followed by some interesting betrayal of metrical expectations in interchanges between soloist and orchestra: the listener is not always sure where the regular pulse of earlier movements has gone. This enables a sense of climax to be achieved before the ideas of the movement's slow opening recur, this time leading to a more substantial cadenza. Would it be wrong to hear a touch of Addinsell's *Warsaw Concerto* in some of the repeated chords? None the less welcome for that, if a fair comparison! The repetitive rhythmic ideas close the concerto with rigorous brass flourishes ensuring a bravura finish to an entertaining and enjoyable work. The performance is engaging, with a forward, clear recording; just the occasional lack of unanimity in upper strings in their highest register might have been addressed.

Symphony No 3

If the role of the concerto as a form in the late twentieth century was by no means cut and dried, the same can be said with equal certainty of the role of the symphony. Composers used and use the term freely to describe a wide variety of musical concepts or forms. The intention to realise extra-musical ideas in symphonic musical form was not new, of course. In fact, the prototype, Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, makes a fascinating point of reference for Joubert's Third Symphony, composed as it was in the same Romantic white heat as inspired Emily Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Those present at the concert performance of Joubert's opera of the same name will recall the dramatic intensity of the composer's setting and its easy lyricism within a modern idiom. This Symphony takes five orchestral interludes as its starting point, these discarded from the much longer version of the opera that Joubert pruned drastically for the concert performance. Taking pre-existing works out of their dramatic context to form an essentially abstract orchestral work

is a bold move. Joubert's essentially symphonic approach to writing his opera, where thematic ideas themselves and their development underpin the rationale for the opera's structure, alongside obvious narrative sense, gives some coherence to the Symphony.

The first of the five movements has strong emotional intensity. Inevitably, in most English operas written post-1945 there are echoes of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, particularly in the woodwind writing, and that is true here. This is no more of a criticism than saying one can hear echoes of Verdi in Puccini. Indeed, mention of Grimes inevitably brings focus on the idea of calling this a symphony rather than, say, *Five Interludes*, given that these movements originally served a similar purpose to those of Britten's *Sea Interludes* in that opera. Judgement on that aspect of the work has to wait until the end of the Symphony is reached. The combined lyricism and vivid orchestral colour in this opening, reflecting Jane's experiences at Lowood School, create an unsettled mood. This is heightened in the opening of the second movement, with its bass clarinet which on first hearing reminded this listener that Mr Rochester refers to Jane at one point as a wicked fairy. Soon, however, the focus turns to a more vigorous mood with a prominent xylophone figure introducing tension which is picked up in the rhythmically insistent writing for full orchestra, a return to traits of the Piano Concerto. This xylophone idea proves a key linking motif throughout the symphony, reflecting as the CD booklet tells us, the character of the unseen Mrs Rochester, Bertha. Transitions of mood help to give these successive movements integrity, just as the role of the orchestral interludes in the opera from which the movements spring was to reflect foregoing, or pre-empt succeeding movements.

Thus the mood of the third movement reflects the urgency and uncertainty surrounding the interrupted marriage of Rochester and Jane in Thornfield Church. The fast music at the start gives way to more regular writing, but with insistent bass figures that sustain the initial energy. Some of the rhythmic ideas preceding the solo horn call are perhaps a little foursquare but rhythmic ingenuity returns in the second half of the movement, where one might regret that Joubert wasn't taken up by the film industry, such is the sense of something dramatic happening. The climax to the movement

re-introduces the xylophone idea in a compelling ending which also proves a significant moment in the structure of the Symphony as a whole.

The fourth movement reflects Jane's stay with the Rivers family. As it opens one begins to feel a slightly episodic element in the structure of the movements, even though they are linked by recurring ideas sufficiently to give the Symphony coherence. Jane's unsettled nature when staying with her distant cousins is well represented but, just as adaptors of the novel for television and film have found it hard to decide, and taken different views on, how to deal with this necessary but distracting episode, one longs to reach the climax of the symphony and of the story. The movement does distract the listener from this mood with a very effective piece of writing focused on two trumpets as the orchestra's coherence appears to dissipate at the end of the movement.

The fifth movement opens with an introduction which clearly states that the denouement approaches. The xylophone lurks in the background and, indeed re-appears mid-movement, but it is overtaken by a forthright statement of the love of Rochester and Jane, complete with bells. Maybe a little simplistic harmonically as the culmination of the many interesting ideas contained in the previous movements?

And is it a symphony? The assertion of the CD sleeve notes that Joubert is 'a master of long-term, symphonic planning' is hyperbole that does the composer few favours in this context. Symphonically, the work is too episodic to justify that judgement, but it is a well-constructed piece, of integrity and considerable orchestral ingenuity. It also captures elements of the wonderful story that is *Jane Eyre* and the composer's undoubted love for it, which he communicates for our enjoyment with passion. Which is, as he himself has stated (see above), his aim. §

CONTRIBUTORS

TOM COXHEAD is a post-graduate researcher at Durham University currently writing an MA thesis on Kenneth Leighton's mass settings under the supervision of Jeremy Dibble. His research interests are focused on 20th Century British music especially concerning British modernism and the influence of French music.

Tom received his initial musical education as a chorister in the choir at Chester Cathedral and learnt the organ with Roger Fisher. He studied at Durham for his undergraduate degree in music and subsequently held the posts of Organ Scholar at Ripon and Assistant Organist at Brecon cathedrals. He is currently Assistant Organist of Ampleforth College.

MARTIN BUSSEY is Chairman of the Finzi Friends and a director of Ludlow English Song. He combines the roles of composer and conductor, currently directing the Chester Bach Singers, the BBC Daily Service Singers, and is a vocal tutor at Manchester University. Martin's *Mary's Hand*, a one-woman show created with Di Sherlock and mezzo-soprano Clare McCaldin, premièred in the summer of 2018 to great critical acclaim. *The Independent* gave it a five-star review and *The Stage* called the music linear, finely-wrought and daringly spare. Further performances are planned throughout 2019. *1916*, a song cycle based on the Irish Easter Rising was given its first performance in 2018 at the Ludlow English Song weekend. Recordings include *Through a glass*, a recording of songs on Resonus Classics. Martin was a Choral Scholar at King's College, Cambridge where he studied composition with Robin Holloway and singing with John Carol Case, after which he studied singing at the Royal Northern College of Music with Nicholas Powell. He ran the aural, academic music and choral programmes at Chetham's School of Music, where he taught from 1988 to 2013. Future plans include a CD of

Martin's choral music sung by the London-based professional choir, Sonoro, to be released by Resonus Classics in 2019. He is currently working on a new piece about Time, inspired by the clockmakers Joyce of Whitchurch.

ZEN KURIYAMA is a solo singer, chamber choir musician, choral conductor, and musicologist. Zen is currently pursuing a Master of Sacred Music degree in Choral Conducting at the University of Notre Dame. Zen holds a Master of Music degree in Voice Performance, summa cum laude, from Stony Brook University where he studied with Randall Scarlata. He has been cast in leading roles with Stony Brook Opera, most notably as Junius in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, and has guest lectured at the college level on the works of Benjamin Britten. Current research interests include the English Musical Renaissance, Counter-Reformation polyphony, interdisciplinary approaches to performing Baroque oratorios, musico-theological analysis of the vocal works of J.S. Bach, and the works of Gerald Finzi. Zen was awarded a Graduate Summer Travel & Research Grant from the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, and spent July 2018 in the U.K. studying the unfinished/unpublished manuscripts and personal letters of Gerald Finzi. While in England, Zen attended Ashmansworth Day sponsored by Finzi Friends. In November 2018 he will have presented his paper 'Gerald Finzi and the English Musical Renaissance' at Durham University's 'English Musical Renaissance and the Church' Conference.

MARTIN LEE-BROWNE first (briefly, as a schoolboy) met the Finzis after the first performance of *Intimations of Immortality* at the 1950 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival, and on a number of subsequent occasions. He and his wife sang in the Festival Chorus for over 20 years from the mid-1960s (including several subsequent performances of *Intimations*) and he was the Chairman of the Festival in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For many years he was a member of the Committee of Finzi Friends. He has a family connection with Delius, and (jointly with Paul Guinery) has written a major book about Delius's music.

MATT POPE is in his second-year at Goldsmiths College, University of London, where he is studying for a Master's degree in Composition. Matt began writing reviews while studying for an undergraduate degree in Music at The University of Manchester. He has written and continues to write music for stage and screen, as well as for his own enjoyment.

GAVIN ROBERTS is a piano accompanist and has partnered singers in recital at most London venues. He is Artistic Director of the recital series *Song in the City*. He has appeared at The Cheltenham Festival, Dartington International Festival, The Ludlow Weekend of English Song, The Ryedale Festival and The Oxford Lieder Festival. He works regularly with soprano Lucy Hall, with whom he was winner of Oxford Lieder Young Artist Platform, and actor Rosamund Shelley, with whom he performs her one-woman shows *Novello & Son* and *War Songs*.

Gavin has appeared regularly on BBC Radio often giving première performances of new works. He has played on numerous recordings for the BBC, ASV, Guild and Priory Records. His most recent project is a CD recording of London-themed song commissions for *Song in the City*.

Gavin studied with Andrew West and Eugene Asti at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he is now a Professor. He previously read Music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he also held the organ scholarship. Following this, Gavin gained a Master's degree from King's College London. Gavin is Organist and Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church.