

## Lakeland Sinfonia Concert Society : Concert Calendar 2011-2012 Season

### Lakeland Sinfonia 17th March 2012

Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus

Ralph Vaughan Williams  
(1872 - 1958)

Characteristic textures from strings and harp introduce us to the folksong world of RVW, who referred to this set of variations as 'reminiscences of various versions [of an old tune] in my own collection'. The tune goes back to the 16th century and is known in Ireland as *The Star of the County Down*, in Scotland as *Gilderoy* and in a variant RVW collected in Norfolk in 1907 as *The Murder of Maria Martin in the Red Barn*.

The work is based on the parable of the rich man (Dives) who refused to help a beggar (Lazarus) who was at his door. Dives is damned to hell-fire while Lazarus achieves salvation in heaven.

This was the first music that was played in Westminster Abbey on the day of the burial of RVW's ashes on Friday 19th September 1958. As Michael Kennedy writes in his book, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 'Into the silence of the Abbey came the first notes of Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus. It was as if Vaughan Williams himself had spoken'. The music was conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, as it had been at the work's first performance in New York in 1939.

There are five continuous variations after the opening *adagio*, the work ending as gently as it begins as a solo cello and harp bring this opulent work to a serene close.

Clarinet Concerto Op. 31

Gerald Finzi  
(1901 - 1956)

Finzi's musical career had taken him from London to Harrogate where he had studied with Farrer, a former pupil of Stanford. Farrer's death in action during the First World War was a blow to the youngster but another teacher was found. In 1922, perhaps into an attempt to tap into the spirit of the English countryside that had inspired Holst, Elgar and Vaughan Williams, he moved to Gloucestershire. He met the composer Herbert Howells and then he moved back into London where Adrian Boult helped to find him teaching work at the Royal Academy of Music. His friendships with composers such as Rubbra, Holst, Ferguson and Bliss were of great importance to Finzi, but he found success with his composing elusive as a violin concerto and then a piano concerto ran into difficulties. In 1939 he and his wife Joyce moved to the countryside, this time to Wiltshire where he developed his love for apple growing, saving many varieties from extinction. He returned to London to work in the Ministry of War Transport until the end of the war. This left him little time for music but after the war a setting of words by Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*, gave him welcome success. Health problems dominated after 1951, when he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease to which he succumbed in 1956, only three weeks after conducting a performance of his *In Terra Pax* at the Three Choirs Festival.

The Clarinet Concerto was completed in 1949 and first performed under the baton of the composer in Hereford cathedral as part of the Three Choirs Festival of that year.

I The first movement sees the clarinet (Finzi's favourite instrument) displaying its lyrical nature and its agility. Both of these elements are more than matched by the writing for the

accompanying strings. The cadenza, inserted at the suggestion of Vaughan Williams, leads to a majestic ending.

**II** Muted strings open the elegiac central movement. The clarinet muses as to the way forward, before the strings introduce the main theme to which the clarinet responds in 'rhapsodic kind'. The music moves towards a dramatic climax before the opening mood is restored.

**III** The finale opens in a forceful manner before the clarinet takes charge with an almost jovial theme, a mood seized upon by the strings. Reminders of material from the first movement appear as the music, delicate, good-humoured and at times wistful, moves to the dazzlingly brilliant conclusion of this important work in the clarinet repertoire.

Idyll: *The Banks of Green Willow*

George Butterworth  
(1885 - 1916)

This evocative music begins with a solitary clarinet playing a memorable theme. Butterworth's orchestral abilities and his treatment of folksongs such as *The Banks of Green Willow* and *Green Bushes* strongly suggest the English countryside. The treatment is quite rhapsodic as wind, horns and strings take it in turn to add their colour and voice - sometimes gentle, sometimes vigorous - but the underlying mood of this music is pastoral and English pastoral at that.

Butterworth was killed in action during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He left a small legacy of music but his gifts influenced a number of composers including his great friend Vaughan Williams.

Symphony No. 99 in E<sup>b</sup>

Joseph Haydn  
(1732 - 1809)

Composed in Vienna between his two visits to London, this was the first of the six symphonies performed in the Salomon concerts between February 1794 and 1795. Of the six, this is the only one without a nickname, but despite this lack of 'popular approval' (most of the nicknames were not of Haydn's doing) the 99th was greeted with 'rapturous applause' so that it had to be repeated the following week. The *Morning Chronicle* said that 'The Overture [customary usage rather than 'symphony' at this time in England] was received with increasing rapture'.

**I Adagio: vivace assai** - the slow introduction is characterised by changes in mood in its 18 bars. This continues in the main part of the movement where a lighter mood gives way to a somewhat stormy episode before a gentle second theme is introduced on first violins and clarinet. This is the first time that Haydn had used clarinets in a symphony. It is this second theme that dominates in the rest of the movement.

**II Adagio** - a feature of this music is the use of the woodwind as a little choir. The audiences of the day found this 'perfect and delightful'. Two startling climaxes are said to express Haydn's grief at the death at the beginning of the year of his beloved friend Marianne von Genzinger.

**III Menuetto** – strings and clarinets get this sturdy minuet underway. In contrast the trio is delicate with the oboe in charge.

**IV Vivace** – here the composer is in total command with music that is dashing and delicate in turn. Woodwind and horns are all given a chance to be soloists, however briefly, before the big guns of the Haydn orchestra, trumpets and timpani, propel the music to the end of this ‘one of the grandest efforts of art’ that the audience of the day had ever witnessed.

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