

# BRITISH WIND MUSIC 1922 - 1982

In the first article of this series, in WINDS WINTER 1996, we traced the history of wind music at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall. It is now seventy five years, a long time in the history of the arts, since Colonel John C Somerville, Commandant of the Royal Military School of Music, put on his grand concert at the Royal Albert Hall, and the event was marked by a concert on March 10th 1997 at the Barbican Centre supported by the Incorporated Society of Musicians and BASBWE. The programme, as in 1922, included the Second Suite by Holst, and began with Fanfare for the Duke of Marlborough by Percy Grainger.

Curiously, while his music met with acclaim, the early "chamber experiments" of Percy Grainger went largely un-noticed and had little influence on his contemporaries. In Lewis Foreman's *The Percy Grainger Companion*, Thomas Slattery writes:

When considering Grainger as an original composer, his significance is not because he initiated particular techniques, but rather that he embraced new ideas and change. From his childhood visions of "free music", through his scholarly notation of folk-songs, his solo wind chamber pieces, his experiments with improvisation, the editing of old music and his experiments with electronic music, Grainger's thoughts, as documented in his writings and his compositions, were always advanced. His concept of woodwind families and woodwind sounds was the beginning of the emergence of a standardization of instrumentation for the wind band. No single composer has done more in this century for the wind band medium.

The most dramatic example of this forward thinking is to be found in *Hill Song no 1 of 1901/1902*; scored for the extraordinary combination of 2 piccolos, 6 oboes, 6 cor anglais, 6 bassoons and contrabassoon, the flow of the music is almost continuous, the bars of 13/8 and 10/8 have little metrical significance and bar-lines are there simply as a convenience. The harmonic language is almost that of Strauss, the rhythmic vitality that of Walton, every voice is treated as a soloist; it was this passion and this chamber concept that was lost in a great deal of the largescale wind band music of the mid-century.

It is tempting to dwell on what might also have happened had Beecham continued his interest in the Beecham Wind Orchestra; In *The Musical Times* of November 1, 1912 we read: The most interesting feature of the present season hitherto has been the formation and appearance of the Beecham Wind

Orchestra or "London Civil Band" under the conductorship of Mr Emile Gilmer. It is the outcome of a desire on Mr Beecham's part to arrest the alleged decline of English wind playing, and to explore new sources of tone colour. Familiar music has been arranged for the "wind orchestra" and composers of repute have been asked to write new music for it. Once more we are in debt to the enterprise of Mr Thomas Beecham, who has the brain to conceive original plans, and the energy and other essential means to fulfil them.

We know little about this venture, it needs researching, but presumably Beecham tired and concentrated his energies on the Beecham Symphony Orchestra which he had started in 1909, and the glittering seasons with Diaghilev's *Ballet Russe*. The torch was carried for a time by Walton O'Donnell and the superb Wireless Military Band which flourished from 1927 until 1943. It had its own staff arranger, Gerrard Williams, and the repertoire was largely made up of orchestral works scored with great virtuosity. Among those who wrote original pieces were Alan Bush and Gustav Holst, who returned to the medium with his arrangement of Bach's *Fuga a la Gigue* and the extraordinary *Hammersmith* of 1930.

It would be interesting to perform again some of the "lost" repertoire of the period between the wars. While the Symphony Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra programme builders can scan three centuries for repertoire, the Wind Ensemble and Wind Orchestra are largely limited to what is available since the twenties. Walton O'Donnell (1887 - 1939) is a composer whose work is perhaps dated but which is charming and still presents a challenge to players. *The Songs of the Gael* is a typical suite based on folk tunes, but with some interesting turns of phrase, while *Three Humoresques* is a superb piece, devilish for the clarinets. Rodney Bashford, in an article in WINDS, states that it was the technical and rhythmic demands of O'Donnell's music which really developed the wind band in this country, rather than

In 1925 Somerville retired and focus of development of the serious use of the medium left these shores and was taken up by the military bands and universities in the USA. From the twenties, works were commissioned for the large scale symphonic band from leading American composers such as Copland, Cowell, Creston, Dahl, Persichetti and Schuman, and emigrés such as Hindemith, Krenek, Milhaud and Schoenberg. These original works

were programmed alongside orchestral arrangements, and the bands ranged from sixty to over one hundred players with multiple doublings in flutes, clarinets and brass.

However, in 1952, Frederick Fennell developed a new concept, founding the Eastman Wind Ensemble which started from the basic format of the British military band, increasing it to allow for triples among the reeds required for Stravinsky's "Symphonies". I could hear how clean this sound was going to be.

This return to the lean scoring of the original Holst Suites, meant that composers for the first time could write for an exact number of voices, confident that the music would be played by solo instruments rather than a mass of flutes, clarinets and brass characteristic of the Symphonic Band. It is probably true to say that most of the best wind music written in the past forty years has been orchestrated with the Eastman Wind concept in mind, while the scoring for the larger band is more suited to *Gebrauchsmusik*, music written primarily for educational or entertainment purposes.

The next six decades in England were not entirely barren; Gordon Jacob, student, friend and amanuensis of Vaughan Williams, continued to write throughout this period, and in the Festival of Britain of 1951, his status was recognised by the commissioning of a work for the Royal Military School of Music, the *Music for a Festival*. Although the work was premiered at the Royal Festival Hall, and met with critical acclaim, it is ignored in the listing of his output in the *New Grove* which mentions only one band work, the *Concerto for Band* (1970). His own listing contains 14 works for wind band, and other works such as the *Concerto for Timpani and Band* and *Symphony A D 76* have been published posthumously by G and M Brand/R. Smith.

Gordon Jacob, although an excellent teacher and musical craftsman, unfortunately did not have the major talent needed at this time to put the wind band on the musical map. However, during the sixties and seventies, a number of important additions to the wind ensemble repertoire were written, most of which still need recording, regular performance and recognition. The first was Alun Hoddinott's *Piano concerto no 1, op 19*, (1960 OUP), a fine work scored for orchestral wind, brass and percussion. Hoddinott followed this with the equally fine *Ritornelli* (1974 OUP) for trombone and chamber ensemble and a year later with the

charming Welsh Airs and Dances (1973 OUP) for symphonic band

Because so many wind works are pièces d'occasion, very often they lie neglected. One such work is Elizabeth Maconchy's superb Music for Wind and Brass (1966 Chester/Music Sales), written for the Thaxted Festival founded by Gustav Holst, a magnificently crafted work for orchestral wind 2222:4331:T, forgotten even by the composer until restored to the repertoire in the eighties. A work by yet another distinguished lady composer, the South African Priaux Rainier, is Ploermel (1972, unpublished but recorded on RR 007); this like Alan Bush's Scherzo for Wind Orchestra (1969, Novello), written for the BBC Symphony Orchestra wind and brass, was a commission for the BBC Proms. The idiom is exciting abrasive, owing something perhaps to the sound-world of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, but with her own primitivism, derived from her native Africa.

While Hoddinott's Welsh Dances, Buxton Orr's John Gay Suite (1973 Novello) and John Gardner's English Dance Suite (OUP) continued the folk-song based traditions of the earlier part of the century, the first "modern" work from this British "Dark Age" was Metamorphoses (1977 Novello) by Edward Gregson. Written for orchestral wind, brass and percussion ensemble without saxophones but with piano and basses, it explores simple aleatoric and electronic techniques, with an echo effect for solo flute and clarinet which is magical. It remains both an excellent introduction to contemporary music and a most enjoyable piece for audiences.

A fine series of commissions for the British Youth Wind Orchestra, now the National Youth Wind Orchestra, was started in the seventies by Andrew McGavin and Harry Legge. These include:

- 1972 *Introduction & Rondo*  
(clarinet choir) Gordon Jacob
- 1974 *Work for clarinet choir*  
Edwin Roxburgh
- Wind Symphony* Stephen Dodgson
- 1976 *Concerto for Wind Orchestra*  
David Morgan
- Tonada Sefardita* (clarinet choir)  
Leonard Salzedo
- 1977 *Symphony 8 The Four Elements*  
Wilfred Josephs
- Epigrams from a Garden*  
(sop & Cl choir) Stephen Dodgson
- 1979 *Processiones* Leonard Salzedo
- 1980 *Scenes from an imaginary Ballet*  
Graham Williams
- 1983 *Sinfonietta* Derek Bourgeois
- 1984 *Ultramarine* John Hopkins
- 1985 *East Coast Sketches* Nigel Hess
- 1986 *Quiet* Gordon Crosse
- 1987 *1984* Dominic Muldowney

- 1988 *Concert Dances* Howard Blake
- 1991 *Theatre Fountain* Gary Carpenter
- 1992 *Sinfonietta no 2* Philip Sparke
- Symphony Our Hopes like*
- Towering Falcons* Colin Touchin
- Bandwagon* Stephen Dodgson

Most are available only from the composers, though some are published and on hire, including Concert Dances & East Coast Sketches from Faber. Quiet from OUP, a beautifully restrained work which should receive many performances, perhaps particularly in 1997, Gordon Crosse's 60th year Theatre Fountain is a piece of great energy, available from Camden Music, and Philip Sparke's Sinfonietta no 2 is available from Studio Music.

There was similar activity north of the Border, where the Scottish Amateur Music Association gave full support to Rodney Bashford's policy for the National Wind Band of Scotland, programming his own arrangements of standard orchestral works, traditional repertoire by Holst, Vaughan Williams, O'Donnell and Gordon Jacob, with new

commissions, sadly few published:

- 1974 *Sinfonietta for Band*  
Arthur Oldham SAMA
- 1976 *The Eagle* Stephen Dodgson comp
- 1977 *Matelot* Stephen Dodgson com
- 1978 *Scottish Tune* Adrian Cruft
- Joad
- 1978 *Beowulf* Peter Naylor SAMA
- 1979 *Caledonia Caprice*  
David Dorward SAMA
- 1980 *The Wee Cooper of Fife*  
Cedric Thorpe Davie SAMA
- 1984 *Tam O'Shanter*  
Learmont Drysdale SAMA
- 1985 *Ronde for Isolde*  
David Bedford Novello
- 1985 *Celebrations* Bruce Fraser

Information about any of the above works can be obtained either from the composers or from SAMA:

National Youth Wind Ensemble of Scotland  
Scottish Amateur Music Association  
18 Craighton Crescent, Alva  
Clackmannanshire  
FK12 5DS

Timothy Reynish

## BIRTH OF BASBWE JULY 1981

In 1981, the College Band Directors National Association, led by its President Frank Battisti, chose the RNCM in Manchester for the first ever International Conference of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles for Conductors, Composers and Publishers.

For the Conference, the RNCM commissioned Derek Bourgeois' first major wind work, *Symphony of Winds* (1981 R. Smith), unjustly neglected because of its alleged technical difficulties, and a work which now might be well worth restoring to the repertoire, as standards of playing continue to increase. The UK was represented by the British Youth Wind Orchestra, playing excerpts from several of their commissions, and the Surrey County Wind Orchestra under David Hamilton, who was to be BASBWE's first Chairman.

The range of music and the standard of performance of the American groups was inspiring and led directly to the formation of BASBWE and its world-wide big brother, WASBE.

In the next decade a new stimulus was provided by BASBWE, through the annual Conferences, through the Journal which later became WINDS, and through the Annual Boosey & Hawkes Festival with which BASBWE has been closely involved since its inception in 1985. Composers and publishers have given a tremendous boost to the development of wind, brass and percussion music in this country, and the fifteen years since the first BASBWE Conference in 1982 need a chapter to themselves in the next edition of WINDS.

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