

# The Wind Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams

by Timothy Reynish

What is curious is the lack of real research into the music of Vaughan Williams; Michael Kennedy, the music critic and author, suggests it is because RVW did not bother to keep track of manuscripts, letters, papers and contracts, so that formal research is a nightmare which even discourages our American colleagues

My own researches threw up a few questions which I hope readers might be able to answer. In the first part I will discuss the thinking of VW on the place of the *March Sea Songs*, in the second explore some of the metric eccentricities of *Toccata Marziale*, suggest a few rehearsal strategies and list misprints, which I have found in comparing the Boosey & Hawkes, score and parts with the original, and with Fennell's list from the *Instrumentalist*.

## Sea Songs Mystery

Nobody seems sure when the première of *Sea Songs* took place Kennedy and others suggest that it might have been at a Festival of Empire in 1923. We have known for some time that it was included in a concert at Kneller Hall in the autumn

Recapitulatory Concert of New works and arrangements for Military Band Wednesday, 3rd October 1923, 3.30 P.M.

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|--|------------------|
| 1 Overture <i>Othello</i>  | H A Kayser       |
| Sent in response to the request for original compositions Written direct for military band and approved for performance by the Committee of Selection. |                  |
| Conductor: Student I. Pay I. R.A.M. A.R.C.M.   |                  |
| 2 Russian Dance <i>Gopak</i>   | J Verney         |
| See note to No. 1  |                  |
| Conductor: Student W. Fitz-Earle   |                  |
| 3 Three Roundels Herbert   | Bedford          |
| (a) The King of Spades (b) The Queen of Hearts (c) The Knave of Diamonds   |                  |
| Conductor: Student R. Marshall   |                  |
| 4 <i>Toccata and Fugue in C major</i>  | Bach             |
| Arranged for military band by Student D. Plater I. R.A.M. A.R.C.M.   |                  |
| Conducted by the Arranger  |                  |
| 5 Suite <i>The Planets</i>   | Holst            |
| (a) Mars (b) Mercury (c) Jupiter   |                  |
| Arranged for military band by Students I. Pay and G. Smith. Conductor: The Director of Music   |                  |
| 6 <i>Variations on Two Short Themes</i>  | J. Verney        |
| (a) Chorale (b) Fanfare (c) Allegro (d) Aftermath (e) Humoresque (f) Militaria   |                  |
| Conductor: Student B. Gumbley  |                  |
| 7 Suite  | Vaughan Williams |
| (a) "Seventeen come Sunday" (b) <i>Sea Songs</i> (c) <i>My bonnie Boy</i>  |                  |
| (d) Folk Songs from Somerset   |                  |
| The Composer's first work for military band  |                  |
| Conductor: Student S. W. Webber A.R.C.M.   |                  |
| 8. <i>Prelude Beatrice</i>   | Percy Harrison   |
| See note to No. 1  |                  |
| Conductor: Student W. C. Windram   |                  |

Earlier in the year, on the 4th July, as part of Commandant Colonel Somerville's plans to involve professional musicians in Kneller Hall, the Director of Music of the Royal College of Music, Sir Hugh Allan, conducted the *Toccata and Fugue in C major* by Bach. In addition, four world premières were given, recorded in a hand-written programme in the Kneller Hall Programme Book, all of which would be "recapitulated" in October. As well as the Harrison and Keyser, the band played three movements from *The Planets*, surprisingly including Venus instead of Jupiter, and *Folk Song Suite*, including *Sea Songs* as the second movement. Why, if the first two documented performances include *Sea Songs* as the second movement of the Folk Song Suite, were only three movements published?

Much of the evidence suggests that VW's original concept was of a four movement work. The key is the same, F minor. The orchestrations published by Boosey & Hawkes are large the same, flute & piccolo, oboes, two E<sub>3</sub> clarinets, clarinets (in *Sea Songs* four B<sub>3</sub> clarinets) E<sub>3</sub> Alto

and B<sub>3</sub> Bass (presumably added for the American market) saxophones

(including baritone), 2 cornets, 2 trumpets, 4 horns, 3 trombones, euphonium (baritone), basses and snare drum, bass drum, cymbals and triangle in the percussion

The late David McBain, Director of Music at Kneller Hall in the fifties, suggested that the publishers felt the four-movement work was too long, and welcomed the chance of extracting a snappy March which could be published separately. One final mystery remains; the original march card parts were issued with a piano conductor score, published like the Suite in 1924, but in 1991 Boosey & Hawkes issued a full score of a 'Corrected Edition'. This still has a number of discrepancies



## Toccata Marziale

I have always been wary of tackling this piece; it seemed, like so much Haydn, to work on two levels, the one superficial, the other requiring incredibly detailed work. Superficially, the *Toccata* seems to be a cheerful military band piece in 3/4 with a few cross-rhythms and displaced accents; closer scrutiny leads to a realisation of greater complexity. Does the main motif start on an upbeat every time, whether it comes on a crotchet or a quaver? At figure 2 is the melodic line really in 7/8, three before 3 surely it should be phrased 2/4 + 3/4, 2/4 + 3/4, at 4 is it possible to make those ff tell on the three different beats of the measure, and if we go back to the original manuscript, can we make the crescendos work on different parts of the measure?

The rhythmic problems are most clearly represented between Figures 6 and 7 - do the low brass and wind start the theme as an upbeat as do the high wind - and between 7 and 8 when the pulse seems to change into 3/8 3/8 2/8. So many of the phrases are actually of 5/4 bars, such as those between 13 and 14. I found eventually that I could hardly conduct it at all, so free are the metric changes within the overall 3/4. It is essential to think in linear terms, as if conducting Tippett. The main beats are entirely subservient to the ever varied metric divisions. As Frederick Fennell says: "The *Toccata* is difficult rhythmically, not because of complex or diverse meters, but in the sophisticated placement of simple fundamental rhythmic impulses and in the constant demand for vitality of tonal production in their precise execution."

The orchestration was of course originally for the small scale British military band, twenty-one lines in all, here given in accordance with Vaughan Williams: Flute and Piccolo, E<sub>3</sub> Clarinets, Oboes, Solo and Ripieno Clarinets, 2nd and 3rd Clarinets, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Bassoons, 4 horns in F, Cornets 1 and 2, Trumpets or Cornets, three Trombones, Euphonium, Basses, Timpani, Snare Drum, Cymbals and Bass Drum, a minimum of thirty-six players. Extra clarinets and saxophones were added by the publishers, who took the published score made in the mid fifties from the parts. What is tantalising is that it was the first movement of a projected Concerto Grosso; an American scholar, Dr Robert Grescheky, found the rough piano score of the slow movement in a manuscript book at the British Library. He has scored it up, but as yet the new movement has not been published. The material in it was the basis for the slow movement of the violin concerto.

A photostat of the original score also led me into revisions of the printed score and parts, in addition to those already listed by Dr Frederick Fennell in his masterly analysis and rehearsal plan in the Basic Band Repertoire series of articles in *The Instrumentalist*. The most cogent dynamic point is the clear placing of the crescendi on the last three quavers of the measure rather than through the whole measure, giving a wonderful forward thrust to the motivic material. Below I have listed the principal changes, some of which may have been in turn altered by Vaughan Williams in publication; these follow his first

thoughts. The most radical alteration is of the last measure which clearly in the manuscript ends with a cut off and a separated final note, but in addition to the forty corrections by Dr Fennell, I have added a further twenty culled from a comparison of the Boosey and Hawkes full score and a rather indistinct photostat of the original. We need a new edition.

## Rehearsing *Toccata Marziale*

Frederick Fennell's analysis and guide to rehearsal must remain obligatory reading and studying to every conductor. I would only add that because this is a dense, energetic, busy score, anything we can do to thin the textures, lighten the accompaniments, and add to the musical phrasing will develop the audience appreciation of what might seem either too trite or too complex a piece. The rhythmic variety needs to be stressed, not with heavy accents but with subtlety of phrasing.

I ask the players to play more legato when possible, since so much is staccato; it is important at the very start to stress that the basses are solo, to encourage them to phrase through to the  $D_b$ , then to accompany. Dr Fennell advocates a separation of the first two notes, but for me the upbeat should lead into the main beat except when marked specifically staccato.

Try to make the trill and its turn into 1 really tell by lightening the rest of the band and making a dim in the basses. At figure 1 we have the problem of the agogic stress on the second beat, a line that suggests a leading to the note. In the second bar, presumably *sim* implies repeating the staccato and the stress 1 before 2 we have the problem of tenuto - strings have a method of using the whole bow with almost a crescendo at the heel and point as they articulate - try asking the band to play the passage staccato, then non-staccato, then tenuto, with the eighth notes really "gluey".

Figure 2 gives us our first mixed metre, two measures of  $7/8$  followed by a  $2/4$  and two measures of  $5/4$ .



At Figure 3 this conspires to get us on to the wrong beat of the measure, so phrase away from the second beat - again the trills and turns are important in inner parts, as are the syncopations in bars 3 and 4. Keep the feel of 2 3 1 2 3 1 until the climax at 4. Figure 4 is difficult to bring off, *ff* treated canonically - invite each group to make a really big crescendo, late, and then to phrase away as soon as they hit the *ff* and the lower and later groups to make a bigger gesture with this climax, building through the measure of 4. At figure 5 Dr Fennell suggests that we need to make a choice between oboe and cornet; if you have two superb players, it may well work with both, but in any case I invite the bassoon to play the counter-melody strongly, and the rest of the accompaniment to be in a very low piano, virtually *pp*.

Balance is crucial before 6, making sure that the 2nd and 3rd parts of the triads are strong (perhaps even stronger than the top). Invite the trombones and euphonium to phrase their line through 6 presents more rhythmic complications, tenuto  $3/8$   $3/8$   $3/8$   $2/8$   $3/8$   $1/8$ . Meanwhile here and in the basses 3 measures before 7, the stress must be on the first note of the motif, not the second or 4th, until the re-affirmation 1 before 7, in *ff* but for me a poco *ff* - we have 15 measures to sustain, and at 7 itself rather more interesting than the main motto is the running passage of 16th notes in the saxophones and bassoons 3 after 7 across the  $3/4$  in the 16th notes we begin to hear the  $6/8$  variant introduced (pre-echo of the 6th Symphony). 4th measure of 7 gives us 8th notes phrased 3+3+2, answered by the same phrase again, interrupted on the upbeat to 3 before 8 by a heavily stressed canon, which I play *ff* followed by poco diminuendo, with the horn and tenor saxophone notes accented and meno *f*.

At 8 the brass must be light with late crescendi, and strong stresses in the syncopated canon between the upper wind and the 3rd clarinet, alto saxophone and cornets, remembering that we need to balance this very carefully. The 3rd and 4th of 8 should in my view stress the tenuto quality and the climax is the augmented version of the theme 3 before 9, hidden in the saxophones and bassoons - this is the largest *ff* of the movement so far... but we will need even stronger dynamics later control.

Between 9 & 10 the texture is that of chamber music - ask your players not to anticipate the diminuendi, and then to take risks in the *pp*

accompagnato, while alto saxophone and euphonium try for a perfect blend to set the scene for all of the later entries. Between 10 and 11 the textures thicken, the tessitura goes higher, so encourage your players not to work hard at the *mf*, crescendo and *f*, they will tell very easily.



Figure 11-12 has a rhythmic phrasing of  $3/4$   $3/8$   $3/8$   $2/8$   $5/4$   $3/8$   $3/8$   $3/8$ . I take a *pp* at 12 for the chords, placing them carefully and asking everyone with sustained notes to make the crescendo late. At the end of the 4th measure of 12 we have successive phrases in  $5/4$  changing to  $3/4$ , 2 measures before 13 with the same passage repeated in lower dynamics from 13-14. I take this as a 12 bar release of dynamic tension, but be careful to keep the energy, through the trills, little accents in the long notes, phrasing the  $5/4$  away (for me) from the 1st beat. 14 -  $G_b$  major, the flattened submediant, beloved of Schubert, and the low point - your players must all realise that they have 25 measures before the recapitulation. First make sure the basses are *pp*, and the trombones a noble but not too strong *p*, horns and saxophones possibly *piu p* - stress the importance of the diminuendi, perhaps ask the tutti at 15 to think in *pp*, it will sound loud simply because it is fully scored, and then take all of the dynamics down 15-16, poco *f* at 16. Strong cross accents 3 before 17, with very clear 16th notes, will add to the energy level without the need for louder playing, 17 a poco fortissimo please, and keep building into the allargando, still retaining some energy to take you over into the tempo, with a *piu fortissimo* on the 4th 8th note in the 5th measure of 18, phrasing to 19 (unless the hall is very resonant).

19-21 brings back procedures, phrasing, articulation and balance concerns that we have already rehearsed above. At 21 I ask the players to drop away after each canonic entry a little, and for the woodwind to make their crescendo quite quickly, brass a little later, still holding something in reserve in all sections for the final *fff* peroration, with its staccato last note.

## Toccata Marziale by Ralph Vaughan Williams

### List of additional corrections by Timothy Reynish

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 3 after 2    | Tutti crescendo starts on second beat  |
| 3 after 3    | side drum crescendo from 3rd quarter note  |
| 5 after 3    | bassoons and basses no crescendo   |
| 4            | bassoons and basses crescendo on 2nd beat to <i>ff</i> on 3rd  |
| 5 after 3    | oboe tenor sax cornets, trumpets trombones, euphonium no crescendo   |
| 4 after 3    | oboe tenor sax horns, cornets trumpets trombones euphonium crescendo for 2 quavers (eighth notes), <i>ff</i> second beat             |
| 5 after 3    | all other players, crescendo on last 3 quavers (eighth notes)  |
| 4 after 5    | oboe cresc 2nd beat, horn and bassoon cresc 3rd beat side drum cresc 3rd beat <i>ff</i> in 4 before 6                                |
| 1 before 9   | Tutti diminuendo last 3 quavers (eighth notes)   |
| 2 after 9    | f1, E <sub>2</sub> oboe and clarinets dim last 3 quavers (eighth notes) tenor saxophone diminuendo last 2 quavers (eighth notes)     |
| 2 before 10  | f1, E <sub>2</sub> oboe cornets climax on 2nd beat don't cresc to next measure   |
| 1 before 15  | diminuendo last 3 quavers (eighth notes) only  |
| 15           | Tutti no crescendo   |
| 1 after 15   | tenor sax bass trb, and euph poco cresc 1st beat   |
| 16           | poco <i>mf</i>   |
| 5 after 16   | all parts which have crescendo printed should be marcato instead   |
| 1 before 21  | piano subito   |
| 21           | 2 and 3 clarinets dim last beat  |
| 1 after 21   | cresc in woodwind semiquavers on last beat only  |
| 4 after 21   | tutti woodwind start crescendo immediately tutti brass and basses poco crescendo until last 3 quavers (eighth notes) then hairpin up |
| 3 before end | side-drum crescendo  |
| last measure | no tie to last note  |

### Additional Corrections from Dr Frederick Fennell

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|-----------------------|---|
| 3 after 3             | $\downarrow$ missing from one of the parts  |
| 3 after 5             | Oboe last note is F <sub>4</sub>  |
| 1 before 10           | 3rd clarinet 2 quavers (8th notes) should be A and G  |
| 3 after 12            | Bassoon 2 remove the $\downarrow$ from the minim (half note)                                |
| 2 before 13           | 2nd cornet F trill to G <sub>4</sub>  |
| 4 before 21           | solo & 1st cornet, it is E <sub>2</sub> in lower octave E <sub>2</sub> natural on last beat |
| 2 measures before end | 2nd cornet should be C E F# not D   |

These corrections should be checked alongside Dr Fennell's original list in *The Instrumentalist* of August 1976.