

marking is *Andante non tanto quasi Moderato* there; when the lyrical theme returns for the last time at the end of the work (now *Moderato assai*, bars 509 ff.) it sounds more moribund than elegiac.

The folk songs suffer at times from an excess of civilization and similarity. Several go at speeds faster than is indicated or seems suitable (e.g. nos 47, 23, 32, 18). The finale (no. 49) is a very salonized account, beginning too quietly, of the Volga barge-haulers' heavy labour.

This is altogether an intriguing item, and leaves the listener favourably impressed, through music heard from a new angle, by Tchaikovsky's craft.

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Vaughan Williams

The Early Chamber Music Piano Quintet in C minor

Nocturne and Scherzo

Suite de Ballet

Romance and Pastorale

Romance

String Quartet in C minor

Quintet in D major

Scherzo

Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes

The Nash Ensemble

Hyperion CDA67381/2 (2 CDs) (134 minutes: DDD), £28.99

Notes included.

Until 1999, the bulk of the music in this collection had not been heard since the first decade of the twentieth century; some had apparently never been performed at all. Its release constitutes both an extraordinary landmark in our understanding of the origins and development of a great composer, and a fascinating window onto British views of modern music c.1900, through the eyes (or ears) of one of its most open-minded and eclectic young composers. We do not tend to think of Vaughan Williams in terms of eclecticism, because he eventually developed one of the most instantly recognizable individual voices of twentieth-century music. Yet this recording reminds us that this particular voice did not emerge with full force until 1909–10, by which time the composer was close to 40, had been a prolific professional composer for over a decade, had studied on the continent with Bruch and Ravel, and had learned indirectly from virtually every major strand of contemporary music; even after that voice emerged, the composer's pre-war development culminated in 1914 with *A London Symphony*, a work as cosmopolitan as the city which it portrays, in which Debussy's *La Mer*, Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, and shades of Mahler and Elgar rub shoulders with English folk song, the whole made to cohere by the sheer force of the composer's by now distinctive style.

Our perspective on *A London Symphony*, including its frame of reference in

terms of influences, has been much deepened by the recent award-winning recording, by Richard Hickox and the London Symphony Orchestra, of the original version of the work (Chandos 9902, released in 2001), which was heavily revised by its composer after his return from the First World War. This version had hitherto languished in obscurity for the same reason as most of the music on the present release: because the composer had withdrawn it and did not want it performed, and his estate, still represented today by his second wife, Ursula Vaughan Williams, loyally stuck to the view that if the composer had decided a work was not good enough to form part of his public *œuvre*, then that was the way things should stay. Nevertheless, in recent years Mrs Vaughan Williams has accepted the argument (at least on a case-by-case basis) that unpublished early works, superseded versions, and other music of this kind may be performed and recorded in a controlled manner, in order to afford a more comprehensive picture of the composer's development. Policy will vary from work to work: as I understand it, the original version of *A London Symphony*, for instance, will not be available for additional performances, having now been documented in the Hickox recording; but for all the chamber works under discussion here, both parts and study scores are being published by Faber & Faber (though I was unfortunately unable to obtain copies in time to use in conjunction with this review), so the intention is clearly to encourage further performance.

All this seems like a sensible compromise, and the results to date (which in addition to *A London Symphony* and this new set include a recording, again by Hickox and the LSO, of the Norfolk Rhapsody no. 2 (Chandos 10001, released 2002) have been nothing short of revelatory, even for scholars such as myself who had been able to study this music in manuscript. And we will surely be hearing more of these works. I find it hard to believe, for instance, that the impressive and deeply poetic Piano Quintet in C minor on the present recording will not generate a lot of interest among performers, especially in a medium hardly overburdened with good repertoire. This highlights a simple but important point: much of the music which is being brought to light is not just fodder for Vaughan Williams scholars, who will be intensely interested in his failures as well as his successes, but is striking and successful in its own terms. This cautions us to remember that in some cases composers withdraw early works, or more informally disown them, not necessarily because they are of poor quality or too obviously derivative, but because they represent phases of stylistic development which the composer no longer wishes to be part of the official record, as it were (take Stravinsky's attitude to some of his early Russian-period works, for instance).

Whatever the reasons, Vaughan Williams withdrew, or at least allowed to lapse into obscurity, a very substantial body of music which he composed before the First World War. There are a number of vocal and choral works, mostly small-scale, but far more striking is a whole clutch of large-scale orchestral and chamber works composed c.1898–1907, nearly all of which were performed in the period before 1914 (many more than once), but which for the most part were left unpublished. The orchestral works, only a couple of which have yet received modern performances, have been surveyed in a preliminary fashion by Michael Vaillancourt,¹ who points out that the disappearance of

¹ 'Coming of Age: The Earliest Orchestral Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams', in *Vaughan Williams Studies*, ed. Alain Frogley (Cambridge, 1996), 23–46.

these works, and the survival instead of the composer's published songs of the period, especially *Songs of Travel* (completed 1904), has skewed our view of the composer's early reception and development, which was shaped by large-scale instrumental music at least as much as by small-scale vocal works.

It might also be argued that the emphasis on vocal and choral works (all in English) has exacerbated the broader tendency for critics to overemphasize the native origins of the composer's inspiration. Here the early instrumental works, both chamber and orchestral, tell a different story – or at least a much richer one. This is clear at the outset from the earliest work represented on this Nash Ensemble set, the String Quartet in C minor, composed in the winter of 1898 but not performed until 1904 (Vaughan Williams had left the Royal College of Music in 1896: none of the pieces discussed here is a student work in the strict sense of that term, though the composer certainly saw himself as an apprentice for some time). In the first movement, from the opening bars the debt is very clearly to Dvořák, whose 'New World' idiom, complete with snapped rhythmic figures, is assumed with apparent ease and fluency; it recurs in the rhapsodic solos of the slow second movement. The third looks forward to the Vaughan Williams of 'Linden Lea' and the hymn tunes. In the variation-form finale we once again encounter the flavour of Eastern Europe, this time Russia, perhaps, rather than Bohemia; formally the finale is probably the least successful of the four movements, with some awkward harmonic gear changes. Overall, however, the quartet is an attractive and mostly convincing work, and the handling of the medium is assured and imaginative (as it is in the two published string quartets, a fact often overlooked in the light of the relatively minor role played by chamber music in general in Vaughan Williams's later *œuvre*).

The same may be said for the more unusually scored Quintet in D major for clarinet, horn, violin, cello, and piano, composed in 1898 and first performed in 1901, in the recital chamber of the Queen's Hall. Discussions of composers' early works tend, understandably enough, to oscillate between one pole of charting influences, and another of identifying prophetic signs of the composer's own mature style. One must also be on the alert, however, for original experiments that were not followed up, and there are hints of this in the quintet. Certainly Brahms, an important early influence for Vaughan Williams elsewhere (mediated through his teacher Parry), is much in evidence, not only in the horn writing, an obvious feature to model on the German master, but also more explicitly in the main theme of the third movement, which virtually quotes the Intermezzo of the Third Symphony; the finale likewise clearly alludes to Smetana's overture to *The Bartered Bride*. Yet the oddly quirky second movement, with its stop-start dance fragments and hints of salon music, offers something more distinctive and not obviously taken up in the composer's later music.

Even more striking in this respect is the remarkable Nocturne and Scherzo for string quintet, originally conceived in 1904, but substantially revised in 1906 (the Nocturne was originally titled Ballade, and the Brahmsian Scherzo was entirely replaced in the revision: both versions of the Scherzo are included here). The anguished, highly chromatic Nocturne anticipates parts of the song cycle *On Wenlock Edge* of a few years later (though one also thinks of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*); but it is the later of the two versions of the Scherzo which really seems to break new ground. Nervously oscillating patterns overlay slower sleight-of-hand chromatic shifts which for this listener seem to anticipate John Adams; closer to Vaughan Williams's time one may look to Sibelius, who

may also have suggested the gradual emergence, as a complete melody is assembled from fragments, of the English folk song quoted in the movement. Debussy may also have had an impact here (this before Vaughan Williams's studies with Ravel) – but above all the impression is one of extraordinary originality. Though there is no mention in Michael Kennedy's otherwise informative booklet notes, in the autograph manuscript the Nocturne is subtitled 'By the bivouac's fitful flame', a reference apparently to Walt Whitman's war poem of that title; Vaughan Williams made a vocal setting of this, never published, which may well date from around the same time (it certainly seems to have been completed no later than 1908). Whitman's poem depicts a soldier's fireside reverie in which a procession of memories and hopes passes by; while it is not difficult to link the general emotional atmosphere of the poem to the Nocturne, the Scherzo is more specifically suggestive, its flickering figuration suggesting a mimetic evocation of the atmospheric background imagery of the fire. Unlike the other works in the recording, this was never performed during the composer's lifetime.

By far the most stylistically consistent and consistently satisfying of the large-scale works in this recording is the Piano Quintet in C minor, originally completed in the autumn of 1903 but then revised twice in the next two years; only after these overhauls did it receive a first performance. Written for a 'Trout' piano quintet, that is, with violin, viola, cello, and double-bass rather than a string quartet, the work is big-boned, passionate, and ambitious; it does not for the most part overstrain the chamber medium, but it is perhaps no surprise to discover in the booklet notes that there is manuscript evidence for the work having been at some point performed using a string orchestra, and in several extended passages it echoes (or anticipates, since both works were conceived around the same time) the rapturous build-ups of *A Sea Symphony*. There are also many thematic connections with the song cycles on which the composer was working during the same time, *Songs of Travel* and *The House of Life* (this is clearest in the second movement, whose main melody is close to that of 'Silent Noon'). Such connections reinforce the fact that although the imprint of Brahms is once again clear, it has been for the most part thoroughly assimilated into a strongly personal idiom in which one can often recognize the later Vaughan Williams; the composer obviously thought so too, to the extent that he revived the variation theme of the last of the three movements for use in his Sonata in A minor for Violin and Piano, completed in 1954. The finale of the quintet is perhaps the most impressive movement, not least for the beautifully realized idyllic reverie of the penultimate variation (here and elsewhere in the work – and also in the D major quintet – one is struck by the effectiveness of the piano writing, an area in which the composer has often been found lacking by critics); this section is all the more telling for following on one of the rapturous climaxes paralleling those of *A Sea Symphony*. Unfortunately, the composer then mechanically ratchets up the tempo and energy level again for the final section, dragging the listener through an overly drawn-out string of sequences which seem to me the only significant blot on an otherwise extremely compelling work.

In addition to these four major unpublished works, the recording includes the *Household Music: Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes* (composed 1940–41), an attractive piece of wartime *Gebrauchsmusik* which has been recorded before but is welcome nevertheless, and three other works (also not new to disc), all of shadowy origins but high musical quality. Two of these, the Romance and

Pastorale for Violin and Piano, and the *Suite de Ballet* for Flute and Piano, most likely date from just before the First World War, but were not published until later, posthumously in the case of the flute suite; the Romance for Viola and Piano was also a posthumous publication, and its date of composition is even more obscure than that of the other two works, though the style suggests the 1920s or early 1930s. All the performances on these discs, especially in the unpublished works, are vivid, passionate, convinced and convincing: one cannot reasonably ask for more. Overall, then, a magnificent achievement on all counts, for which Hyperion and the Nash Ensemble are to be warmly thanked.

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Wolf

Lieder nach Heine und Lenau

Stephan Genz *bar* Roger Vignoles *pf*
Hyperion CDA67343 (67 minutes: DDD), £14.99
Notes, texts and translations included.

With the recent centenary of Wolf's death on 22 February 1903, the issue of this recording is particularly timely. Except for the setting of Heine's 'Wo wird einst' which dates from 1888, the period of Wolf's mature Mörike Lieder, none of these songs appears to have been recorded before and none was published in his lifetime. Instead some of them were gathered together by Ferdinand Foll in the year of the composer's death and subsequently published by Lauterbach and Kuhn of Leipzig as *Lieder aus der Jugendzeit*.

Foll was one of many musicians coming through the circles of the Viennese Wagner Society who sought to ensure a niche for Wolf alongside Bruckner and Wagner. Comparisons with Wagner helped to emphasize the psychological significance of Wolf's penetrating sketches. Taking up the banner of Nietzsche, Wolf even claimed that his songs could surpass Wagner in their search for 'truth', by condensing the power of *Tristan und Isolde* into one harmonic progression. Yet as Susan Youens has pointed out in her monograph *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music* (Princeton, 1992), Wolf served his musical apprenticeship 'under the sign of Schumann' not Wagner. As a 16-year-old student of the Vienna Conservatoire the composer openly acknowledged his debt, and in 1876 he began his Heine settings with two poems that had been famously set by Schumann, 'Du bist wie eine Blume' and 'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh'. The first of these settings is a dutiful reworking of the master's song, shadowing its approach to line, texture and phrasing and, as confirmed by listening to this recorded collection, similar reminiscences of Schumann re-emerge throughout the Heine songs. When Wolf first measured up to Wagner in his Mörike volume, he seemed mature enough to rethink and recast every Wagnerian trait. Any recognition of a pre-existing musical style became part of a game to underline Wolf's distinctive reading of the poem. Yet in the Heine settings