Edinburgh University Orchestral Concerts

SEASON 1951-52

MUSIC HALL

Saturday, 8th March 1952, at 7.30 p.m.

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS'

A SEA SYMPHONY

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY
MUSICAL SOCIETY CHOIR

Conductor - - - SIDNEY NEWMAN
Leader of Orchestra - Dr JOHN FAIRBAIRN

Soloists :

JOAN ALEXANDER
RODERICK JONES

PROGRAMME

Italian Symphony Op. 90 - - - - - *Mendelssohn*

Allegro vivace—Andante con moto—
Con moto moderato—Saltarello : Presto.

A Sea Symphony - - - - - *Vaughan Williams*

for Soprano and Baritone Soli, Chorus and Orchestra

A Sea Symphony

Words by Walt Whitman

I. A SONG FOR ALL SEAS, ALL SHIPS

Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships ;
See, where their white sails, bellying in the wind, speckle the green and blue,
See, the steamers coming and going, steaming in or out of port,
See, dusky and undulating, the long pennants of smoke.
Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships.

— — — — — — —

To-day a rude brief recitative,
Of ships sailing the seas, each with its special flag or ship-signal,
Of unnamed heroes in the ships—of waves spreading and spreading far as the eye can reach,
Of dashing spray, and the winds piping and blowing,
And out of these a chant for the sailors of all nations,
Fitful like a surge.
Of sea-captains young and old, and the mates, and all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay,
Picked sparingly, without noise by thee, old ocean, chosen by thee,
Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time, and unitest nations,
Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,
Indomitable, untamed as thee.

Flaunt out, O sea, your separate flags of nations!
Flaunt out visible as ever the various ship-signals!
But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul of man one flag above all the rest,
A spiritual woven signal for all nations, emblem of man elate above death,
Token of all brave captains and all intrepid sailors and mates,
And all that went down doing their duty,
Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid captains young and old,
A pennant universal, subtly waving all time, o'er all brave sailors,
All seas, all ships.

II. ON THE BEACH AT NIGHT ALONE

On the beach at night alone,
As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,
As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future.
A vast similitude interlocks all,
All distances of place however wide,
All distances of time,
All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different,
All nations, all identities that have existed or may exist,
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spanned,
And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them.

III. (SCHERZO) THE WAVES

After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,
After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,
Below, a myriad, myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,
Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,
Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying,
Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven, emulous waves,
Toward that whirling current, laughing and buoyant with curves,
Where the great vessel sailing and tacking displaced the surface,
Larger and smaller waves in the spread of the ocean yearnfully flowing,
The wake of the sea-ship after she passes, flashing and frolicsome under the sun,
A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many fragments,
Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.

IV. THE EXPLORERS

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Covered all over with visible power and beauty,
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon and countless stars above,
Below, the manifold grass and waters,
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention,
Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.

— — — — — — —

Down from the gardens of Asia descending,
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,
Wandering, yearning, with restless explorations,
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts
With that sad incessant refrain,—' *Wherefore unsatisfied soul ?*
Whither O mocking life ? '

— — — — — — —

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children ?
Who justify these restless explorations ?
Who speak, the secret of impassive earth ?

— — — — — — —

Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be carried out,
Perhaps even now the time has arrived,
After the seas are all crossed,
After the great captains and engineers have accomplished their work,
After the noble inventors,
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

— — — — — — —

O we can wait no longer,
We too take ship O Soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O Soul).
Caroling free, singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

O Soul thou pleasest me, I thee,
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, like waters flowing,
Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,
Bathe me, O God, in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them.
Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee O Soul, thou actual me,
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.

— — — — — — —

Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding O Soul thou journeyest forth ;

— — — — — — —

Away O Soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!
Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only.
Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave Soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God ?
O farther, farther, farther sail!