

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS

SEASON 1969-70

Second Concert

REID ORCHESTRA

Leader: MILES BASTER

Conductor: SIDNEY NEWMAN

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 30th OCTOBER, 1969

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

Programme

1. OVERTURE: "THE WASPS"

Vaughan Williams

(1872-1958)

The overture and incidental music to Aristophanes' comedy "The Wasps" was composed for a performance of the play (in Greek) at Cambridge in 1909. This Overture has long been firmly established in the orchestral repertoire—the instrumental part of the incidental music, much less often to be heard, has been recorded by Decca with Sir Adrian Boult as conductor.

At the outset the busy buzzing of the wasps is heard—the wasps being those Athenian citizens who had an officious relish for serving in the law court for a suitable fee. Of the main themes of the overture, the first two represent the old Philocleon who did his duty in the courts whilst the young men were away at the war. The broad generous tune of the second subject represents Bdelycleon his son, (the enemy of the demagogue Cleon), and his reconciliation with his father.

2. SYMPHONY No. 5 IN D MAJOR

Vaughan Williams

Preludio (Moderato—Allegro—Moderato).

Scherzo (Presto).

Romanza (Lento).

Passacaglia.

Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony, dedicated to Sibelius, received its first performance in London in June 1943. The following note, written for the first Edinburgh performance by the Reid Symphony Orchestra in January 1944, would require revision and additions if it were to be brought up to date. The long contemplated "morality" opera "Pilgrim's Progress" completed in 1948-49 was produced in April 1951, and the extent of common ground between it and the Symphony could then be studied. Meanwhile the Sixth Symphony, composed in the years 1944-47 and first performed in April 1948, had thrown down a challenge no less formidable than that of the Fourth though differing in nature and emphasis. Yet perhaps my original short note may serve to show the spirit in which one first received this work—a spirit unassailable by the powers of onslaught or the frozen wastes of anaesthesia.

The years immediately before the outbreak of this war wrung from Vaughan Williams in his F minor Symphony a cry of burning indignation that the world should already be ensnared in the toils of impending conflict. The new symphony, completed after three years of war, speaks peace; not, I feel sure, because it attempts to prophesy what the world may achieve, but because it reveals the inward peace and serene joy to which a life enriched with abundant wealth of experience as a creative artist has attained. The reflective character of his music has in general been so predominant that we may too easily forget the gaiety, the engaging wit of "poisoned kisses," the unpredictable turbulence of two or three exceptional works, the power of his

apocalyptic vision, the splendour of his great hymns of praise and many another quality. This symphony is indeed reflective, even quite literally in the sense that it looks back—not in order to ponder again the things that have been, but rather to bring us by familiar ways to a country not unknown but transfigured indeed and illumined by a joy so abundant and yet so serene that it is all pervading. I can only liken what I experience in this final passacaglia to that which abides with one throughout and long after the singing of that unendingly joyful and profoundly mystical carol "Tomorrow shall be my dancing day . . . to lead my true love to my dance."

The composer has intimated that "Some of the themes of this symphony are taken from an unfinished opera 'The Pilgrims Progress,' but except in the slow movement the symphony has no dramatic connection with Bunyan's allegory." The slow movement (Romanza) bears the quotation—"Upon that place there stood a cross and a little below a sepulchre." Then he said "He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death."

INTERVAL

3. SYMPHONY No. 5 (Op. 50)

Carl Nielsen

(1865-1931)

I. Tempo giusto—Adagio non troppo.

II. Allegro—Presto—Andante un poco tranquillo—Allegro.

Only within the last twenty years have we in Britain had the opportunity to begin to realise the stature of Carl Nielsen—outstandingly as a symphonist, and secondly through some of his chamber music. There are other sides of the composer that we do not know at first hand, notably his two operas (and the humour abounding in the latter of these, "Masquerade"). This is not the place to write a tribute to, or assessment of, the man's whole work, but to pay tribute to the whole man in the performance of a supreme work—"supreme," not in any implication that it is necessarily to be adjudged the greatest of his six symphonies (or even of the last four in which he is truly himself) but supreme because the man has the commanding measure of the well-nigh immeasurable scene of human conflict despoiling the quiet beauty of the lands, battling with ultimate impotence against the heart of things in such measure as to compel our realisation of the majesty of events, and in the aftermath the firm declaration, in the complexity of man's nature and of the aspirations of head and heart, of ultimate grandeur, of an optimism that shall prevail. If I am right in my reading of the ultimate significance of this great music, then it will be clear that this symphony without name (composed in the years immediately after the Great War and completed in 1921) extends upon a different scene the philosophy that found expression in Symphony No. 4 "The Inextinguishable" (or "The Unquenchable") composed in 1914-16, which emphasises the "elemental Will of Life" that prevails in all living creation.

I forbear to describe or analyse the sequence of musical events. The overall shape of things is shown in the movement headings given above. A guide to such a scene and such events might be an impertinence.

(Note written for Centenary performance, 1965)

S.T.M.N.