

JOB—A Masque for Dancing

Vaughan Williams, Blake and The Bible

JOB — A MASQUE FOR DANCING, by R. Vaughan Williams, has now been recorded by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, and it will be broadcast by 2YA at 8.0 p.m. on Tuesday, October 15. The work is based on William Blake's illustrations to *The Book of Job*, and the music of it was first heard in England in 1930. The scenario was made by Dr. Geoffrey Keynes, a London surgeon who has edited the writings of Blake (as well as those of Sir Thomas Browne and Izaak Walton), and the stage settings, in eight

scenes are named by the composer Introduction, Pastoral Dance, Satan's Appeal to God, and Saraband of the Sons of God.

Scene Two: Satan goes forth. He dances. He sits upon God's throne.

Scene Three: Job's children are dancing. Their dance, a minuet, is instructed to be "formal, statuesque, and slightly voluptuous." They are destroyed by "a great wind from the wilderness."

Scene Four: Job's Dream, Dance of Plague, Pestilence, Famine, and Battle. Satan evokes these visions of tribulation, they dance round Job, and then vanish.

Scene Five: Dance of the Messengers; Job awakes and the news is broken to



BLAKE'S ENGRAVING of Elihu saying "I am Young and ye are very Old." This picture is the basis of Scene seven in the masque, "Elihu's Dance of Youth and Beauty," and it exhibits the qualities which Dr. Keynes thought cried out for ballet treatment. We have reproduced this picture from the copy in the Alexander Turnbull Library of "The Book of Job," illustrated by William Blake.

scenes, were by Mrs. Gwendolen Raverat. Ninette de Valois devised the choreography.

According to Frank Howes (music critic of *The Times*, who has written a description of the work), Dr. Keynes believed that there was behind the elaborate grandeur of Blake's designs an extractable dramatic thread of strong simplicity, and that the designs were all ready for staging, with poses and groupings that cried out for ballet treatment. Dr. Keynes made the scenario, and Vaughan Williams wrote the music, preferring to call the whole a "masque for dancing" rather than use the term "ballet."

In the recording, scene one takes two sides, the next five fill one side each, and scene seven and the epilogue are on the last two sides. The following brief synopsis of the scenes may help listeners follow the work when they hear it:

Scene One: The family of Job, in the sunset of prosperity, is dancing. Satan enters; Heaven opens, revealing God (Job's spiritual self) and the Heavenly Hosts. Job's spiritual self consents to temptation. The musical sections of this

him. His family is gone and his wealth, too. The funeral tread is heard. Yet Job can still praise God.

Scene Six: Dance of Job's Comforters; Job's Curse; A Vision of Satan. Blake depicted the comforters as accusers. Satan introduces them, and Vaughan Williams uses a saxophone for this passage.

Scene Seven: Elihu's Dance of Youth and Beauty, and Pavane of the Sons of the Morning. The first illustrates Elihu saying "Ye are old and I am very young," and the stage direction that follows it says: "Heaven gradually shines behind the stars. Dim figures seen in a solemn dance. As Heaven grows lighter, they are seen to be the Sons of the Morning, dancing before God's throne" (as in Blake's Plate 14). The music for this is the Pavane, and a Galliard represents the words "All the Sons of God shouted for Joy."

The final section is an *Epilogue*, a pastoral setting for Job, old and humbled, blessed again, surrounded by his family on whom he bestows his blessing. His friends bring presents. The dancers are grouped as in Blake's plates 19 and 20.



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