

# SIXTH SYMPHONY

Vaughan Williams Works up at 75

A FEW weeks ago British music lovers crowded into the Albert Hall, London, to hear the world premiere of the Sixth Symphony of 75-year-old Ralph Vaughan Williams. The work was conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. After the wild stridencies of his F Major Symphony and the remote, mystical atmosphere of his Fifth (composed in 1943) listeners did not know quite what to expect from the old master this time. As Eric Blom said in 1942: "Nobody knows what Vaughan Williams may bring forth next, for as he approaches his 70th year he is more enterprising



RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS  
"More enterprising than ever"

than ever, and quite ready to adopt the most daring means of expression if he feels that he requires them . . . At the same time he can be more exquisitely tender than ever, and in a human, intimate way that rarely appeared in his early work."

Both of these characteristics appear to have been brought out in his Symphony No. 6. The music critic of *Time* described it as consisting of "four uninterrupted movements that went on for an hour-and-a-half. The first three were tuneful, brassy, and sometimes stridently dissonant. The last movement some found uncomfortably soft; muted strings and wood winds seemed to keep restoring to life a passage that was repeatedly ready to die."

Born in Gloucestershire, of Welsh stock, Vaughan Williams was the son of a clergyman and educated at Charterhouse School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took his Doctorate of Music in 1901. He studied composition under Max Bruch in Berlin and Maurice Ravel in Paris, but he felt that English composers should work out for themselves their own characteristic style. He began to take an early interest in the recovery and study of old country tunes, and joined the Folk Song Society in 1904. Some of the results of his research were incorporated into his *Three Norfolk Rhapsodies* (1906-7), and there has been a strong folk-song element in almost all of his compositions since then, especially

in the choral work *On Wenlock Edge*. His influence in this direction has led to what has been called the "school of Vaughan Williams."

Other trends in his work became apparent in his *Tallis Fantasia* (1910), a cool ethereal work whose translucent mysticism was something new to contemporary music. This mystical quality re-appeared in many of his subsequent compositions, reaching its peak in the Fifth Symphony. But the variety of his work does not stop there. His folkish *London Symphony*, the masque-like *Job*, and the satirical humour of *Sir John in Love* and *The Poisoned Kiss* all emphasise the breadth of his vision and the completeness of his art, which has been described as the most individual in English music since Purcell.

## Happy Birthday

Last October Vaughan Williams celebrated his 75th birthday with a party at his home in Dorking, Surrey, which was attended by many eminent musicians. They presented him with a six-valve portable radio set. Other tributes included a rendering at Dorking of his *Sea Symphony* by the Croydon Philharmonic Society, and a performance of his *London Symphony* by the BBC Symphony Orchestra at which he acted as guest conductor.

A birthday tribute to the composer published in *News Review* said: "At 75 Dr. Vaughan Williams is more active than a good many men of 50. Dorking-ites are used to seeing him strolling through the town with a shopping basket—a tall, ungainly figure with massive leonine head . . . At home, he spends most of his time sitting by the bedside of his wife, an arthritis sufferer, while in the other rooms music scores are strewn carelessly on tables and chairs and on a Broadwood grand piano."

In 1935 Vaughan Williams received the much-coveted and very rare distinction of the Order of Merit for his services to English music, services which as yet show no sign of diminishing, for his publication at 75 of a Sixth Symphony shows that the grand old man of English music may have many more years of creative activity still before him.

## NEWS FROM 3ZB

THE new 3ZB serial *Beloved Rogue* is a story set in England in 1660 when, with Cromwell dead, the people are ready for music and laughter. Into their midst comes a mysterious stranger answering only to the name of Rupert. His adventures, and the eventual revelation of his identity, constitute the main-spring of a gripping story. *Beloved Rogue* is heard at 8.45 p.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

A CHILDREN'S painting competition is being run by 3ZB in conjunction with a campaign for conserving electricity. So far, 3ZB tells us, 20,000 entry forms have been issued. There are 69 prizes, three of them being—appropriately enough for Christchurch—bicycles. The idea, of course, is not only to get the children painting, but to encourage them also to carry the campaign for saving power into their own homes.

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