

Band Music Reviews (August 2007)

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The 2007-2008 academic year will bring celebrations of the lives and works of two remarkable composers: **Leroy Anderson** (1908-1975) and **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872-1958). Anderson is one of America's most beloved composers – a musical Norman Rockwell whose tunes have become a part of the fabric of American popular culture. With at least 36 works available for band, wishing Anderson a happy birthday will be a breeze. For information about the composer as well as a complete list of works, visit: www.leroy-anderson.com

Across the Atlantic and around the world, musicians will also be remembering Vaughan Williams – a towering figure in the annals of British symphonic music. Given the central role of British bands and composers in the development of the instrumentation and repertoire of American concert bands, the Vaughan Williams anniversary is a great educational opportunity. Look to Boosey & Hawkes and Oxford as the principle publishers of British music, although most of the titles I mention here are probably already in your library. For the most up-to-date picture of concert band repertoire and activities in Great Britain, including program notes, discographies, historical information, and music reviews, log on to: www.timreynish.com

Well-known among concert band musicians are Vaughan Williams' **English Folk Song Suite** (grade 4 – jaunty, but replete with scoring problems) and its erstwhile companion **Sea Songs** (grade 4 – same scoring issues, double the repetitiveness), **Flourish for Wind Band** (grade 3 – solid but brief), and **Toccata Marziale** (grade 5 – stodgy but pleasant). Among the great transcriptions of Vaughan Williams' works are Beeler's version of **Rhosymedre** (grade 3 – a beautiful chorale setting for young bands), Hunsberger's setting of the **Variations for Wind Band** (grade 5 – an excellent alternative for those who'd like to branch out from the *Folk Song Suite*), and Alfred Reed's arrangement of **Sine Nomine** (grade 3 – a useful ceremonial march along the lines of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*). The smallest and in many ways brightest

gem in the wind works of Vaughan Williams is the **Scherzo alla Marcia**. This grade 5 miniature is the original second movement of his *Symphony No. 8* extracted as a stand-alone piece. Scored for orchestral winds without tuba, it is an ideal vehicle for those with an agile woodwind cohort. Quirky and modal, the *Scherzo* is three minutes and forty-five seconds delightfully spent.

There are numerous options to complement Vaughan Williams in any celebration of British wind music. Foremost among them is Vaughan Williams' close friend, **Gustav Holst** (1874-1934). At the top of the list are the ubiquitous **Suites for Military Band**, both grade 4 classics. Look for the Colin Matthews editions if you're in the market for a new set. However, some excellent alternatives are: the **Moorside Suite** (grade 4 – three movements including the famous march), **Hammersmith** (grade 5 – arguably Holst's best work), and Holst's setting of Bach in the **Fugue à la Gigue** (a healthy grade 4 and an excellent show of agility for any ensemble).

Next comes **Gordon Jacob** (1895-1984). Well-known is the grade 4 classic **William Byrd Suite**, but less familiar is its brother the **Giles Farnaby Suite** (also grade 4). Similarly, **An Original Suite** (grade 4) is known to many while Jacob's **Concerto for Band** (also grade 4) is rarely performed. His **Flag of Stars** overture is an old school grade 5 favorite that has also fallen out of popularity recently.

Moving to another giant of the British classical scene we find **William Walton** (1902-1983). If **Crown Imperial** is too taxing in its grade 5 glory, try his **Miniatures for Wind Band**. These ten tiny movements range from grade 2 to 4. Fourteen minutes long, the *Miniatures* are arranged by Bram Wiggins from Walton's *Music for Children*. For those with less experienced ensembles that would like to join in the celebration, consider the grade 2 classic **Early English Suite** by **Duncombe**, arranged by Walter Finlayson. This little gem is the British equivalent of Morton Gould's *Mini Suite* and will sit well on virtually any program.

More recent additions to the British repertoire come to us from **Malcolm Arnold** (1921-2006). If **Four Scottish Dances** (grade 4-5) is out of reach for your group, try the **English Dances** (grade 4, arranged by Johnstone) or the **Four Cornish Dances** (grade 4, arranged by Marciniak). Tired of **Prelude, Siciliano and Rondo** (grade 4)? Try **Sarabande and Polka** (grade

4, arranged by Paynter). If you're up for a challenge, don't forget Arnold's most vibrant of tone poems **Tam O'Shanter** (grade 5 – a guaranteed crowd pleaser). If marches are the order of the day, try either of Arnold's colorful grade 4s: **The Duke of Cambridge**, or **The Padstow Lifeboat** (a personal favorite). To learn more about Arnold, go to: www.malcolmarnold.co.uk/index.php

One of the more colorful characters on the contemporary British scene is **Guy Woolfenden** (b. 1937). His post as music director of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre provided fodder for wonderfully evocative suites such as **Illyrian Dances** (grade 4) and **Gallimaufry** (grade 5). More recent compositions by Woolfenden, including sound clips, can be found at: www.arielmusic.co.uk/index.html

Other British composers to keep an eye out for:

Philip Sparke: www.philipsparke.com Everything from grade 1.5 to 6. Look for *Orient Express*.

Martin Ellerby: www.martinellerby.com Look for *Paris Sketches* among others.

Adam Gorb: www.adamgorb.co.uk Check out *Yiddish Dances*, and *Bridgewater Breeze*.

Harder to find, but worth the search: **Malcolm Binney** (*Emerald Breeze*, *Timpanaglio*, *Visions of Light*).