

PETER WARLOCK SOCIETY

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PETER WARLOCK society NEWSLETTER

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BAILEY'S RECORD ISSUED.

Norman Bailey's welcome L'Oiseau Lyre record of 26 Warlock songs is now available (DSLO 19). It was featured on the BBC's 'Stereo Release' one Saturday morning and has had a generally favourable reception in the music press – although that very individual critic Peter Pirie was unhappy about it in *Records and Recording*. We publish his review on a separate sheet, also the *Gramophone's* report.

Our own view is that there is perhaps no singer who could make a complete success of all 26 songs, but Mr Bailey is very convincing in most of them, and is always interesting. We couldn't agree less with Pirie's comment about 'painful intonation'.

Mr Bailey's accompanist on the record, Geoffrey Parsons, has recently been made an honorary member of the society, and wrote a charming letter accepting.

BBC SERIES – AND A NEW RECORD

Many members will have heard some, if not all, of the BBC's series of Warlock concerts broadcast in September. It was, we thought, rather a curate's egg affair: some of the solo singers – John Noble, Robert Tear, Ian Partridge, April Cantelo, Carole Rosen – were distinctly more successful than others. But perhaps we should be grateful the series happened at all, giving the chance to hear some lesser-known items.

We understand that early in 1978, L'Oiseau Lyre are to issue a record using some of the BBC performances – in particular, those by the Louis Halsey Singers and Robert Tear. Fred Tomlinson has been asked to provide the sleeve-notes. More details in the next newsletter.

The news of this record comes at a time when the Pearl record of Warlock choral music has gone out of print and is unlikely to be reprinted.

DR COPLEY'S BOOK – NEWS, NEWS!

The non-publication – so far – of Dr Ian Copley's book on Warlock's music is one of the scandals of publishing history. Pressure has recently been brought to bear, however, and the last few months has seen some frantic behind-the-scenes activity by the publishers, Dennis Dobson. Dr Copley has been asked to make some additions and up-datings, and it now looks as if there is a good chance of publication in March. In view of past let-downs we are reluctant to be firmer than that, but here's hoping the next issue of the newsletter will be able to announce the special offer to Society members that Mr Dobson has promised.

WARLOCK PUB-CRAWL

Plans have often been mooted for a Warlock pub-crawl. Alas, in London most of the pubs frequented by him are either no longer extant or dispense beer that can only be described as intolerable.

Newsletter readers may remember that a few years ago committee members visited Hambleton ('The Bat and Ball'), and Bramdean ('The Fox'), to present framed copies of the appropriate Warlock songs. This could be well worth a repeat, but could perhaps wait until New Year's Day 1979 – the 50th anniversary of the famous cricket match.

Tentative plans for a pub-crawl are being made for next Spring, and those interested are asked to let us know. First thoughts on an itinerary include the Wye Valley; Tintern Abbey, Whitney (where PH frequently

stayed with his aunt at the Rectory), Hay (the largest second-hand bookshop in the world, and good beer direct from the cask); the Severn Valley and Cefn Bryntalch (of the two nearest pubs, Abermule was nearer but the beer was better at Montgomery); Bishop's Castle (what beer enthusiast could miss one of the few pubs in the country with its own brewery!); the Cotswolds and Oxford.

It would seem to need an overnight stop somewhere in Wales, but plans are of necessity vague until we get an idea of numbers. Any other suggestions are welcome.

DELIUS IN PICTURES

Philip Heseltine quite rightly finds a place in the very attractive *Delius: A Life in Pictures*, by Lionel Carley and Robert Threlfall (Oxford, £6.95). The 100 large pages are packed with illustrations, the vast majority of which will be new to almost all readers. Portrait photos of the past invariably have an hypnotic quality (today's more casual style is somehow much less revealing), and the examples printed here help greatly to illuminate names that have become familiar to us in the various biographies of Delius. The linking text – some quotes from Delius himself and from his wide range of friends like Gauguin, Strindberg, Munch and Rodin – neatly touches in the main outlines of the life, and only in a few cases do the illustrations seem irrelevant.

The book's designer has been over-ambitious in several places and there are examples of unreadable superimposed text and unhappily juxtaposed photos. Such flaws should have been eliminated, but they only slightly mar the pleasure of a welcome volume, which stirs the thought that something as attractive could easily be done – and surely one day will – for Philip Heseltine.

PUBLICATION OF 'MUSIC TO MURDER BY'

In a previous newsletter we wrote about 'Music to Murder By', David Pownell's play about Warlock and Gesualdo, which had performances at the 1976 Edinburgh Festival and elsewhere. The play is to be published by Faber next February, and there may be some London performances in 1978.

NOTELETS AND CHRISTMAS CARD

There are still some Warlock notelets and Christmas cards available at pre-inflation prices (see enclosed order form).

Also available this year is a Christmas card with the 'Christmas Greetings' written by Warlock for Bernard van Dieren in 1917 (the arrangement of 'The First Nowell' published by Thames in 'Homages'). The back page is the same form as the Notelets. These are available at £1.50 per packet of 10, including post and packing. Please order from Malcolm Rudland, separately for the Notelets.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Warlock found himself with strange bedfellows in the Redcliffe Concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on November 7. *The Curlew* was preceded by the first performance of Roger North's *Ludes* and followed by Boulez's *Le Marteau sans Maître*. Francis Routh contributed a very sympathetic and perceptive programme note on *The Curlew*, showing how the work is built musically round the 'Tristan' chord.

AMERICAN VISITOR

We were delighted to meet one of our American members, Bill Marsh, when he was in London recently. Bill is chairman of the Philadelphia Branch of the Delius Society, which presented an all-English concert in the Curtis Institute of Music last March. Included was *The Curlew*.

IN BRIEF . . .

- Volume 2 of Fred Tomlinson's *A Peter Warlock Handbook* is still in print; copies can be had from the Triad Press (22 Pheasants Way, Rickmansworth, Herts.).
Volume 3, the final volume, is in preparation but publication is not now expected until the second half of 1978.
- Sets of parts of '*The Curlew*' are available for sale through the Society. Apply to the editor (address above).
- An experienced amateur film-maker, Paul Wilcox, has asked for help from the Society in making a film about Warlock. This help is being given; we'll report in later newsletters on progress.

WARLOCK: 26 Songs. Norman Bailey (bass-baritone), Geoffrey Parsons (piano). Oiseau-Lyre DSLO 19. £3.50.

I WRITE OF this record with considerable diffidence, for I do not finally know what to make of it. On the face of it the disc should be a joy: no less than 26 Warlock songs, some of them seldom sung, by a most distinguished singer and a well-known accompanist. But when I first played the record I was bewildered, and called in several other people to test my impression; and although several playings have mollified the shock, I still feel that the whole project is rather dubious.

Norman Bailey is one of our finest Wagner singers. Now, Wagner singers do occasionally make good art-song interpreters, even Wotans, as Friedrich Schorr proves; but seldom. The immediate impression is that Norman Bailey's voice spreads all round the notes, his intonation is suspect throughout the record and he is occasionally — notably in *The Birds* and *To the Memory of a Great Singer* — out of tune. Of course, it depends on how sensitive you are to pitch, and his voice spreads so much on occasion that it is difficult to tell which note he is singing, but I found his intonation painful.

Again, the huge, unwieldy voice is stylistically wrong for these delicate, subtle songs. The best singing is in the fast songs, notably *Yarmouth Fair*, *Jillian of Berry* and *Youth*; but for the slower ones the kind of phrasing that passes in *The Ring* is altogether too unsubtle. In their very nature many of these songs are wrong for a massive operatic voice. Roy Henderson used to sing them superlatively well, but his was a Lieder-type baritone. Even so, some of these songs — particularly *Passing By*, *After Two Years* and *Sigh no More Ladies* — argue a tenor voice, and in our time Ian Partridge is an ideal interpreter of these. But my mind boggled altogether when Norman Bailey sang *The Bayly berith the Bell away*. The poem is medieval; it is narrated in the first person by a very young girl lying naked — the servants having taken away the bell — and awaiting her ravisher: "And through the glass window shines the sun, How should I love, and I so young?" The idea of Wotan singing this, a song absolutely ruled out for any singer but a light soprano, reveals a lack of artistic sensitivity that pervades the whole record.

The Fox, *My Own Country* and *The Frostbound Wood* are tolerable, but insensitive; *Ha'nacker Mill* is a disaster. In two of the songs a chorus is introduced, balanced right back, but with sufficiently good intonation to throw the soloist into unfortunate relief; the balance throughout is bad. The voice is a big one, certainly, but should the accompanist be so distantly recorded? Warlock's piano parts are as important as those in Lieder, and should be heard. Apart from bad balance, the recording is good. It may be that some people, less sensitive to pitch and style than I am, will enjoy this record.

PETER PIRIE

WARLOCK. SONGS. Norman Bailey (bass-baritone), Geoffrey Parsons (piano). Oiseau-Lyre DSL019 (£3.50); © KDSL019 (£3.75). Texts included.

Youth; As ever I saw; There is a lady sweet and kind; Whenas the rye reach to the chin; Sigh no more, ladies; Sleep; Pretty ring time; Jillian of Berry; The bayly berith the bell away; Passing by; The frostbound wood; Robin goodfellow; Twelve oxen; Yarmouth Fair; Romance; To the memory of a great singer; After two years; The droll lover; Ha'nacker Mill; My own country; The birds; Elore lo; The fox; Fair and true; Roister doister; The cricketers of Hambleton.

Twenty-six songs in just less than twice twenty-six minutes: no wonder the word most commonly attached to Warlock is 'miniaturist'. 'Exquisite' is the adjective that usually goes with it—though Osbert Sitwell's term for the songs was "Wardour Street". They are, like their composer, a strange mixture: Dowland crossed with Delius and taken to the farm, the pub and even the cricket-ground, and when not so sociable, then hauntingly inner and reflective. Certainly, out of the mixture comes a consistently personal voice; there can be few composers whose style is so clearly recognizable through such a slender volume of written work.

This recital ranges from songs withdrawn in mood (such as *The frostbound wood*) to the jovial (*The droll lover*) to the downright hearty (*Twelve oxen*). There is usually charm in the good cheer (as in *Elore lo*), and a strength of simplicity in the quietness (*My own country*). Such a compound of qualities in the composition requires much sensitivity in the performers, and there are technical difficulties as well.

The pianist has to have a nice staccato and a feeling for cross-rhythms, as well as a certain zest, taking his courage in both hands. Geoffrey Parsons plays so well that the accompaniments are a delight in themselves. The singer needs breadth of phrase and of vocal range, and Norman Bailey has these. Sometimes he is imaginative and catches the mood of the song well, as in *The bayly berith the bell away*. Sometimes he is rather unaffectionate and charmless as in *As ever I saw* (contrast Partridge on Enigma Classics VAR1027, 7/77). Quite often his vowels have a nasal quality (marked, for instance, in *Sleep*), and it is only occasionally that the tone sounds really beautiful. Yet much taste and care have gone into these performances; there is a sense of enjoyment in the recital; and some such programme of Warlock's songs has been long wanted.

J.B.S.

'Gramophone'

'Records and Recording'

- The Society is planning to put on a Purcell Room concert – possibly as a joint venture – in the 1978-9 season. Date will be given in the next newsletter.
- We enclose an up-to-date version of the Society's leaflet. More copies are available from the editor should you have a prospective member in mind.
- The Thames publication *Warlock and Delius*, by Fred Tomlinson, is now out of print and will not be reprinted.
- The Hilliard Ensemble are giving a series of four concerts of English music at the Wigmore Hall. That on January 12, entitled 'Elizabethan Ecstasies', celebrates the spirit of Elizabethan England and includes songs by Warlock.
- Society member Frank Bayford is compiling a book giving a detailed catalogue of commemorative plaques and memorials to British composers. He'd welcome any information members of the Society are able to give him. His address is 'Greys Laurel', 21 Canonbury Road, Enfield, Middlesex.
- Warlock's Capriol Suite turns up in yet another recorded version, in a concert given by George Hurst and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta on RCA RL25071. Perhaps someday a commercial recording will be made of the full orchestral version (a tape from a BBC broadcast exists).
- Warlock's 'Two Codpieces', which have proved very popular in the piano-duet arrangement made by Fred Tomlinson, have recently been arranged for saxophone quartet by Carey Blyton. Score and parts will be issued by Thames Publishing early in 1978.
- We were delighted recently to discover a typeface called 'Warlock'. It is in fact the one we are using for the heading of this newsletter.

1977 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

We have had another fairly busy year, one way and another. You will have noticed that we have only had two Newsletters, but they were very meaty ones. It is important to give members value for money – particularly those away from London. Postage being what it is, it seems better to reduce the frequency while increasing the amplitude.

With the two issues we included copies of *The Everlasting Voices* with Tony Ingle's award-winning alternative ending, the two Wagner parodies *Rêves d'Isolde*, two facsimiles of PH autograph letters, and a number of articles.

Still on the subject of printing, the Society underwrote my own booklet *Warlock and Delius*. This was very well received and sold out quickly – in fact the 2nd edition is well on the way to selling out

The success of this has led us to plan a more ambitious publications scheme which will be announced later.

There have been a number of Warlock performances over the year, including two complete programmes. In our own Purcell Room concert on December 18th, 1976 we managed to include almost all of the carols – it was one of my happiest birthdays ever, being able to wallow in Warlock most of the day. Then last month in the Wigmore Hall the Phoebus Trio gave their recital, a nicely chosen balance of well-known and not-so-well-known songs, and a rare opportunity to hear the *Folk Song Preludes*. Paul Ekins is to be congratulated on his work devising the programme, and I hope the trio are able to spread the gospel to music societies around the country.

One record must be mentioned – the most important for some time. Indeed, if we exclude *The Curlew* this is the only Warlock song-recital available now David Johnston's record is out of print. Having previously only heard Norman Bailey singing Wagner, I was curious – apprehensive even – about the result of his tackling Warlock, particularly when I saw the list of songs. I need not have worried. This large voice is beautifully controlled and he sings the lighter songs as 'trippingly on the tongue' as PH would have wished. His breath-control is unbelievable. Geoffrey Parsons makes the accompaniments sound easy – no mean feat, and the truest test of an artist. I don't know when the record will be issued but I managed to get a test-pressing and we will be listening to some items later in the afternoon. Quite a few of the songs have never before appeared on record.

Astonishingly, items of Warlockiana continue to turn up. Most important is the correspondence between PH and Bernard van Dieren which was thought to be lost. I was able to borrow these letters and there was so much new information that I could't stop myself writing another book!

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for their contribution to a successful and enjoyable year.

Fred Tomlinson.