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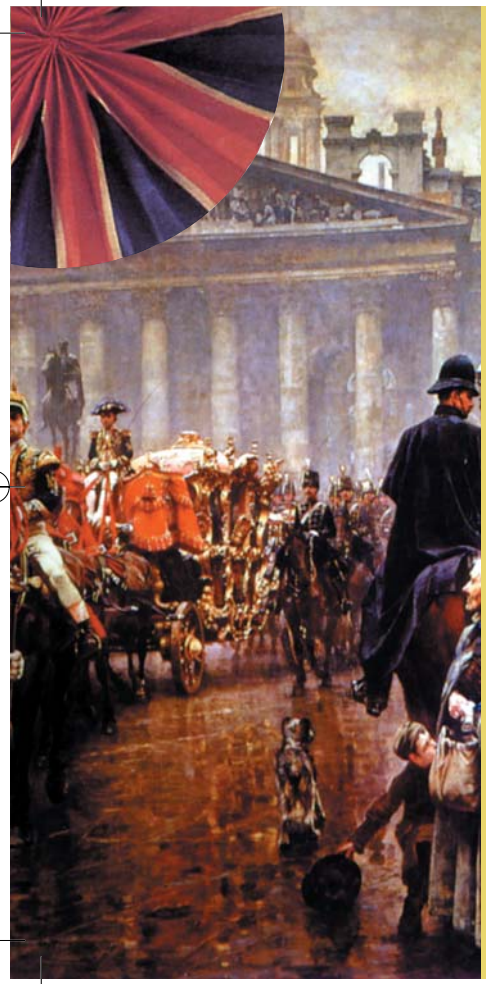

CHAN **241-10**

CHANDOS 2:1

WALTON

Symphony No. 1
Cello Concerto • Belshazzar's Feast
Coronation Te Deum • Crown Imperial
Anniversary Fanfare • Orb and Sceptre

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Sir William Walton (1902–1983)

COMPACT DISC ONE

		Symphony No. 1*	**43:19**
1	I	Allegro assai	13:19
2	II	Presto con malizia	6:54
3	III	Andante con malincolia	10:10
4	IV	Maestoso – Brioso ed ardentamente – Vivacissimo – Maestoso	12:48
		Cello Concerto*	**32:57**
5	I	Moderato	9:02
6	II	Allegro appassionato	6:26
7	III	Lento – Allegro molto	17:23
		with **Ralph Kirshbaum** cello	
			TT 76:24

COMPACT DISC TWO

	Belshazzar's Feast*†	**33:24**
1	Thus spake Isaiah –	4:55
2	If I forget thee, O Jerusalem –	5:14
3	Babylon was a great city –	4:07
4	Praise ye –	5:03
5	Thus in Babylon –	3:15
6	And in that same hour –	1:46
7	Then sing aloud to God –	4:13
8	The trumpeters and pipers are silent –	1:14
9	Then sing aloud to God	3:36
	with **Sherill Milnes** baritone	

10	**Coronation Te Deum*‡** with **George McPhee** organ	**9:54**
11	**Coronation March: Crown Imperial§**	**6:39**
12	**Anniversary Fanfare§ –**	**0:46**
13	**Coronation March: Orb and Sceptre§**	**7:07**
		TT 58:13

Royal Scottish National Orchestra Chorus†‡
Scottish Festival Brass Bands†
Royal Scottish National Orchestra*
Philharmonia Orchestra§
Alexander Gibson*
David Willcocks§

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Such was the interest in Walton's music that when his **Symphony No. 1** was delayed by finale-problems after it was announced for performance in 1934, he took the exceptional step of letting the first three movements be heard first, this unfinished Symphony then played as a finished work the next year, both times conducted by Sir Hamilton Harty. Walton was then aged thirty-three, having turned his early success with the wittily irreverent *Façade* music (1922) to more lyrical purpose in a *Sinfonia concertante* for piano and orchestra (1927) and the Viola Concerto (1929), and then revitalized the moribund oratorio tradition with his vividly barbaric *Belshazzar's Feast* (1931).

Always a slow worker, Walton was further confronted at this time by the threat of collapse to traditional symphonic methods of working through a fabric of tonality and key-relationships in the subtler pulls and tensions between broad polarities. In a work that expresses an unusual degree of emotional unease as a tense and bitter seeming personal drama, he found his solution by building his powerful opening movement on a series of pedal-points: a held note, usually in the bass, which acts as harmonic anchor for the flow of music about it until it moves to a different pedal.

The first pedal-point here is that of the timpani roll on B flat at the outset, setting the work's basic key in the minor at first, to be resolved into the major at the end. A strenuous rhythm on the violins and an oboe theme of repeated notes plus a twirl becomes a primary element in a sonata-type movement of great force and impetuous character. Among several melodic ideas a long theme for two solo cellos affords the main contrast with the opening, and the music builds to a powerful climax, the tension broken only by reverting to the B flat pedal, and a restatement of the initial ideas in different form carried on a rhythmic surge to the movement's end.

The following scherzo carries the tonality from B flat into the furthermost contrast of E, the unusual *con malizia* marking alluding to an abusive disruption of accepted harmony by assertive discord. This is

reinforced by such instrumental techniques as requiring the strings to play with the wood of the bows, or near the bridge of the instrument, or bouncing their bows from the strings, and the horns to switch from open to closed notes blown as hard as possible, while the basic metre of three in a bar is constantly disrupted by cross-rhythms and five-beat metres.

Walton also qualifies the slow movement by marking it *con malincolia*, bringing relief from the foregoing violence by relating itself to pedal-points while a solo flute spins a gently lyrical melody, from which each new phrase grows organically out of what has gone before. The feeling is of a stricken sense of loss, rising to a passionate cry before subsiding into uneasy melancholy. The problem of an adequate finale was duly resolved in a fugue, bringing an energetic display of orchestral virtuosity to lead eventually into a confident B flat major, modified in a poignant trumpet theme before achieving a resolute ending.

After the concertos composed for viola (1929) and violin (1939), Walton's third and last the **Cello Concerto**, was written for the Russian–American cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, who gave its first performance at Boston early in 1957 and introduced it to Britain a few weeks later. It was the composer's next major work after the opera *Troilus and Cressida* (1954), with which it shares some musical resemblances as well as an appealing lyricism. Attention is focused on the distinctive character of the cello's upper register, as in the long main theme of an opening movement that is quite like a love-song, and from which most of the work's other ideas are derived in one way or another.

As in Walton's other concertos, the middle movement is a scintillating scherzo, so deftly designed and scored in its delicate transparency that the cellist is able to assert brilliance of effect as well as eloquence of expression. A rapid alternation between short fast and slow passages is another distinctive feature, as well as a continuing tonal uncertainty. The finale Walton considered to be related improvisations, of which two are in the manner of elaborate cadenzas for the soloist alone. The second of these leads by way of high trills into an epilogue, where earlier ideas from this and the opening movement are recalled before the soloist calmly ends the work with a firm low C.

Among the works that established the early reputation of Sir William Walton was **Belshazzar's Feast**, first performed at the

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Leeds Triennial Festival in 1931, when he was twenty-nine. It also newly invigorated the almost moribund English tradition of Biblical oratorio with a rare vividness of drama-through-music, combining boldness of colour and vocal ardour with a mature subtlety of expression at times able to convey emotional and spiritual implications on two planes simultaneously. It is scored for double chorus, baritone solo, and a large orchestra including organ, much percussion and two brass ensembles placed so as to answer each other from opposite sides.

The text was chosen from the Bible by Sir Osbert Sitwell, and arranged in a symphonic three-part shape, the events linked in recitative by the baritone. The main narrative is from the Book of Daniel, chapter 5, enclosed within verses from Psalms 137 and 81, and prefaced by Isaiah's prophecy, 'The day of the Lord is at hand'. This is harshly intoned by the male voices after the opening trombone fanfare, and followed by the chorus lamenting the exiles' fate 'by the waters of Babylon', then rising to a fierce vehemence as they confidently predict Babylon's impending doom.

Part two begins with the baritone's swaggering summary of Babylonian riches. The chorus sings of Belshazzar's great feast and voices appalled horror at the desecration of drinking-vessels pillaged from the Temple at Jerusalem. The king leads wild songs in praise of heathen gods, each material wealth vividly illustrated in the orchestra, and a frenzied march of crude barbarity brings a great climax at the impious cry, 'O King, live for ever!' After a shocked silence, the soloist declaims the fateful writing on the wall, and tells how in that night Belshazzar was slain, the word 'slain!' echoed in a tumultuous shout from the full chorus.

The last part is a mighty paean of praise, exulting in the joy of deliverance and the destruction of the heathen. A contrasting interlude spares a thought for those who might regret the fate of Babylon the Great, but this is soon submerged by the resumed hymn of praise and by joyful Alleluias rebounding from side to side, ending in an orchestral blaze of triumph.

Walton was in attendance at two coronations, composing the *Crown Imperial* march for George VI in 1937, and *Orb and Sceptre* for Elizabeth II in 1953, when he also contributed the magnificent **Coronation Te Deum** that was sung in Westminster Abbey after the Blessing of the newly crowned Queen on her throne. It is a dramatic setting of the text often resembling *Belshazzar* in vigour and boldness. The music changes character in line with the sentiments of the words, from the orchestra and organ's plunge into the first grand shout of praise, by way of flowing melodies for semi-chorus or full choir, to the calm and confident supplication of the closing prayer.

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In his lifetime critics were much given to declaring that after the war Walton merely repeated himself, more-or-less, with each new work. Today, I hope, we know better. The two coronation marches **Crown Imperial** (1937) and **Orb and Sceptre** (1953) are commonly bracketed together, but in character they are worlds apart – literally 'worlds', since the first belongs to – and is an unwitting picture of, an evocation of – the pre-war world (or rather the inter-wars period); the second is neo-Elizabethan.

Walton claimed to have derived the titles of both *Crown Imperial* and *Orb and Sceptre* from Shakespeare (*Henry V*) –

> 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre and the ball,
> The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
> The intertissued robe of gold and pearl…

– but he may also have been mindful of Dunbar: of the line in *In Honour of the City of London* which, modernized, reads:

> In beauty bearing the Crown Imperial.

Though Walton's 1937 coronation march bears his personal stamp – the brass chords in the coda, for instance, could be the work of no one else – the music has a certain stateliness, a dignity, a touch of formality, which cannot fail to bring Elgar and the Edwardian era to mind; and it was natural that Walton should look to Elgar as a model. *Orb and Sceptre*, on the other hand, is very 'Festival of Britain': the construction of London's South Bank complex in 1951 marked an upsurge of patriotic triumphalism, and the crowning of a new, radiant, young Queen in 1953 was supposed to herald a new Elizabethan age in its fullest variety of manifestations. All this is reflected in *Orb and Sceptre* which has a lighter, brighter key than *Crown Imperial* (the flighty, sparkling E major with its four sharps as opposed to the solid, pragmatic C major with no accidentals at all), greater rhythmic zest, and an orchestral exuberance which recalls Percy Grainger at his most uninhibited. In the event, of course, the world went on its wicked way unregarding as before, but this was never any concern of Walton's – at least in his music, which remained brimful of light and life to the end.

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Orb and Sceptre is preceded in this recording by the **Anniversary Fanfare** (for nine trumpets, seven trombones, timpani and percussion) composed for EMI's seventy-fifth Anniversary Concert at the Royal Festival Hall in November 1973. The final bars incorporate a reference to 'Happy Birthday to You' (you have to listen hard to spot it, not because it's concealed but because it's so well integrated!) and are specially designed to lead into *Orb and Sceptre* without a break.

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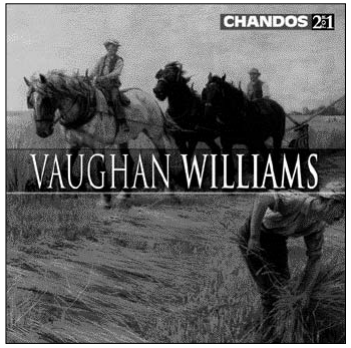

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CHANDOS DIGITAL 2-disc set **CHAN 241-10**

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		TT 76:24

COMPACT DISC TWO

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