

DOY CD164

THE HISTORY OF BRASS BAND MUSIC

Elgar Howarth

Grimethorpe Colliery (UK Coal) Band

1.	Tristan and Isolde Prelude	9.17
2.	Praeludium	2.39
3.	Nabucco Overture	6.39
4.	On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring	5.59
5.	Academic Festive Overture	9.55
6.-10.	Giles Farnaby Suite	6.55
6.	<i>Galiarda</i>	1.23
7.	<i>His Dream</i>	1.18
8.	<i>His Humour</i>	1.17
9.	<i>His Rest</i>	1.27
10.	<i>Mal Sims</i>	1.30
11.	Froissart Overture	13.30
12.	Des Pas sur la Neige	3.50
13.-16.	Four Scottish Dances	8.53
13.	<i>Movement I</i>	2.08
14.	<i>Movement II</i>	2.06
15.	<i>Movement III</i>	3.18
16.	<i>Movement IV</i>	1.21

Total CD Playing Time 68.26

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Classical Arrangements

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This, the penultimate disc in The History of Brass Band Music series is devoted entirely to transcriptions from orchestral scores and in two cases arrangements of keyboard pieces. I have tried to demonstrate the great variety of styles which have attracted the attention of those experts in the genre which not only tie necessary musical skills successfully to transform original scores into a convincing new form, but too with that streak of daring even recklessness which takes one by surprise.

Alexander Owen certainly surprises. None other in his day would have dared set music from *Tristan and Isolde*, few would now. His transcription of the famous *Prelude* is included in the much longer Grand Selection. It provided a benchmark for the future.

William Halliwell is most famous as a conductor and leader, but Järnefelt's *Praeludium* in his hands sparkles with light charm and quiet humour. William Rimmer, one of the band world's most influential figures is included here in a bold version of Verdi's *Nabucco Overture*.

To slightly more modern times – the band sound changing somewhat with the grace and tact of Denis Wrights' pen. Brahms *Academic Festival Overture* recorded here is one of his most popular contributions to the bands' repertoire.

Most 'surprising' of all is *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* of Delius. Logically it should not work; amazingly Peter Warlock's transcription does – beautifully, illustrating the poetic potential of the medium.

Eric Ball's work as composer and transcriber is well documented. Never brash he makes a very personal sound, in love with the cantabile style for which the bands are famous without losing their ability for full blooded drama. Howard Snell and I occupy the arrangement slots.

I believe I was the first to present Tudor music to the bands – this a long time ago as an 18 year old. These pieces were scored some years later in my twenties; I felt they gave a freshness to band sound. Howard Snell is one of the greatest arranger-transcribers of all. *Des Pas sur la Neige (Steps in the Snow)* is a miracle of delicacy, mystery, nuance, a million miles away from any clichéd approach.

The disc finishes in high virtuosity with Ray Farr's brilliant, technically exhilarating version of Arnold's *Four Scottish Dances*. Here is the modern sound par excellence, bright but multi-coloured rivalling the original orchestral score in its excitement. Malcolm Arnold loved it.

As with all the recordings in this series there are omissions I regret. Alexander 'Sandy' Smith deserves a place here, he is as talented an arranger as he is the outstanding tenor horn player of his generation. Circumstances prevented the inclusion of any of his work here.

Norway, which has provided several fine bands during the last 25 years or so, has emerged as a source of brilliant arrangers – three in particular; Reid Gilje, Frøde Rydland and Svein-Henrik Giske – all current members of the Eikanger-Bjørsvik Band. There will be others in the future.
Elgar Howarth

Grimethorpe Colliery Band



Soprano Cornet
Kevin Crockford

Principal Cornet
Richard Marshall

Solo Cornet
John Hudson
Gregory Timmins
David Barraclough

Second Cornet
Mike Kennedy
Martin Grimes

Third Cornet
Colin Brook
Michael Green

Flugel Horn
Ian Shires

Solo Horn
Alexander Smith

First Horn
Jim Fletcher

Second Horn
Stephen Peacock

Solo Baritone
Robert Archer
Second Baritone
Clifford Hopes

Solo Euphonium
Michael Dodd

Second Euphonium
Shaun Hudson

Solo Trombone
Richard Brown

Second Trombone
Stephen Haynes

Bass Trombone
Mark Frost

Eb Bass
Shaun Crowther
Richard Wilton

Bb Bass
Dean Morley
Gary Proctor

Percussion
Peter Matthews
David Hartland
Gavin Pritchard
Richard Clough

Band Secretary
Terry Webster

The Grimethorpe Colliery Band

The Grimethorpe Colliery Band was formed in 1917, as a leisure activity for the workmen at the colliery. It was initially financed by the colliery, a sister company, and a welfare fund set up by the miners themselves. The musicians, most of whom worked at the colliery full-time, perfected their skills through competition. From 1932 to 1945 the band entered 42 such competitions, winning 19 and never coming lower than fifth!

The turning point in Grimethorpe's history, however, was the appointment of Elgar Howarth as professional conductor and music adviser in 1972. An outsider to the brass band world, (although he did play in a band as a boy, conducted by his father) Howarth's association with Grimethorpe was the inspiration behind the commissioning of new works by leading avant garde composers. The band has commissioned works from such composers as Hans Werner Henze and Sir Harrison Birtwistle.

In 1992, shock waves reverberated around the mining community in Great Britain when the government announced its programme of pit closures. It soon became apparent that Grimethorpe was on the list of mines to be shut. Even as recently as 1992, 17 members of the band were employed at Grimethorpe Colliery. The pit closures were announced just 5 days before the

band were due to contest the National Brass Band Championships at the Royal Albert Hall, London. Needless to say, the pressure was immense, the world's media seized on the band as a 'new angle' for their stories, but, as in all the best fairy tales, the band triumphed to become the Champion Band of Great Britain.

Soon after the victory at the Nationals a board of trustees was formed to manage the finances of the band through this difficult period. Financial backing continued from British Coal until 1995 when RJB Mining PLC agreed to fund the band, an agreement which continues to this day under its new name of UK Coal.

Greater international fame came with the making of the 1995 film *Brassed Off!* for which the band provided the soundtrack music. The film was nominated for a BAFTA award and as a result the band has toured extensively ever since throughout Europe and further afield to Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and USA. The band has also recently become the first ever brass band to become an ensemble-in-residence at the Royal College of Music in London. With the continued support of UK Coal, the band is in good health and its future now looks secure.

Elgar Howarth

Elgar Howarth was born into a brass band family, becoming principal cornet of the Barton Hall Works Band when only 14 years old. His father, the band's conductor, was his only teacher until, at the age of 17, he took trumpet lessons from Cecil Kidd at the Royal Manchester College of Music, by which time he had won the Alexander Owen Memorial Scholarship and written his first piece for brass band.



A longstanding ambition has been achieved during the last 10 years or so at Garsington Festival Opera, where he has conducted a succession of operas by Richard Strauss.

In March 1997 Howarth was recognised for his achievements in the field of Opera and was the recipient of an Olivier Award, with particular reference to his work on Henze's *Prince of*

Homburg and Zimmerman's *Die Soldaten*.

After studying at Manchester University he became a professional trumpeter, first with the Royal Opera House Orchestra at Covent Garden and later with various London orchestras and ensembles. It was with the London Sinfonietta that he made his conducting debut in 1969. His career since 1975 has been international, conducting opera and concerts in most European countries as well as appearing regularly with the leading British orchestras and opera companies.

Opera indeed has been an obsession since 1978 when he premièred Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* in Stockholm. Since then he has fulfilled invitations from, for example, Covent Garden, English National Opera, Opera North, Glyndebourne and further afield, Sydney, Hamburg and Paris.

When, in 1972, he was invited to become Music Adviser to the Grimethorpe Colliery Band, he accepted on the understanding that the band would engage wholeheartedly in new, modern scores - often commissions of the most uncompromising virtuosity. Composition has remained, in fact, a major interest for himself, and he lists among many pieces for brass band and ensembles, his own favourites as: *Songs for BL*, *Hymns at Heaven's Gate*, *The Euphonium Concerto* (subtitled *Stories for Saroyan*), *Fanfares for Philip Jones* and *Ascendit in Coeli*.

Wearing his other hat, under the pseudonym W. Hogarth Lear, Howarth has written a series of light pieces which proved popular with television audiences through the Granada Band of the Year Contest during the seventies.

THE HISTORY OF BRASS BAND MUSIC CLASSICAL ARRANGEMENTS

Arrangements, transcriptions and the idiom of the Brass Band

The brass band became ubiquitous in Britain from the late 1840s, when instruments following the designs of the Belgian instrument maker Adolphe Sax became widely available at affordable prices for working men with access to deferred payment schemes. Most instruments were sold not as individual items but as sets, and most manufacturers sold sets for small, medium-sized and large bands. Each manufacturer or retailer had his own idea of what constituted a properly voiced set of instruments. Consequently there was no standard format for the brass band, but these combinations were the first attempts to formalise the instrumental line-up. This was acknowledged in the production of 'journal music' for bands: monthly publications containing transcriptions of popular pieces for groupings that very broadly matched the band formats promoted by the instrument retailers. Bands would subscribe to these journals and get a few pieces a month to add to their repertoire. Alternative parts were included in each set so that most eventualities could be covered. The ascription of clef signs and transpositions could hardly have been more pragmatic.

The primary objective here was to provide brass bands with music that they could play, because it was the concept of the working man engaging with what was perceived as the morally decent activity of musical performance that had encouraged the dominant classes to support the formation of brass bands (hire-purchase schemes depended on the existence of a guarantor). This concept was further enhanced by the idea that these players were musically literate and were engaging with a repertoire derived from opera and the classics: music that matched the tastes of respectable society. But it did not take long for a new and surprising concept to emerge: that brass bands were worth listening to. The formation of a brass band audience had as decisive an impact on the phenomenon as the formation of the bands themselves. Brass bands played in open air concerts and the events that ran alongside seasonal rituals (such as Easter and harvest festivals), but the contest soon became the primary forum for brass bands. While the competitive element was important, it is easy to overlook the significance of the brass band contest as a musical occasion in which fabulous virtuosity and subtle lyricism were displayed to massive audiences. These

different combinations of instruments.

Howard Snell's stunning arrangement of *Des Pas sur la Neige (Steps in the Snow)* from the *First Book of Preludes* for piano (1910) by Claude Debussy captures the transparency of Debussy's colours. Its achievement comes from Snell's ability to cast the brass band as an extraordinarily subtle vehicle for the performance of a work which depends on the transmission of the finest nuances of harmony and timbre. These qualities have been increasingly exploited in original works of the late twentieth century, but Snell's arrangement exposes him as one of the greatest of all arrangers for brass band. As with Elgar Howarth's arrangement of Farnaby's music, the intention is not to imitate the

original but rather to recast its musical meaning in a new and revealing way.

Ray Farr's brilliantly colourful arrangement of Malcolm Arnold's *Four Scottish Dances* could hardly be more successful in capturing the exuberance of the original. It was first performed at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, in the concert following the 1984 European Brass Band Contest. Arnold, another a former professional trumpeter, made the long journey to Scotland especially to hear it, and was delighted by it. We can only imagine that his reaction may have been typical of many of the composers whose work has been arranged so expertly on this disc.

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Trevor Herbert is Professor of Music at the Open University

Future titles in this series:

New Adventures

Suggested further listening of Classical Arrangements

Tristan and Isolde
Featured on Wagner

Wagner arr. Owen
DOY/CD033

Little Fugue in G Minor
Featured on Grimthorpe in Concert Vol. 3

Bach arr. Smith
SFZ 134

Pictures at an Exhibition
Featured on Pictures at an Exhibition

Mussorgsky arr. Howarth
DOY/CD011

Hansel and Gretel
Featured on The Early Years

Humperdinck arr. Godfrey
DOY/CD162

The Warlock scholars who dismiss his brass band arrangement of Delius's *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* (probably made in 1928) as a mere curiosity should be more circumspect. Not only is this an excellent arrangement, but it testifies to Warlock's absorbing interest in the brass band. In the mid-1920s he was writing small-scale pieces for the village band of Hambleton in Hampshire, and the archive of works in Warlock's own hand contains evidence of his intention to write original works for the medium – an intention which may have been signalled less than three months before his death in 1930, when he wrote an article in the *Daily Telegraph* entitled 'The Artistic Value of the Brass Band'.

Brahms' *Academic Festive Overture* is here performed in an arrangement by Denis Wright (1895-1967). Wright, a schoolmaster, made a tentative entry into the brass band world in 1925, but became one of its formidable figures and the first appointed by the BBC to be a supervisor for its brass and military band broadcasting. He composed just seven original works, but a vast number of arrangements. The brass band historian Roy Newsome has described him as the initiator of the modern style of brass band arrangers.

The arrangement of Elgar's *Froissart Overture* is by Eric Ball, originally a Salvation Army composer

who, unusually for his time, made the transition to the contesting brass band world. Ball's original compositions form part of the canon of the traditional brass band repertoire. He was adept at writing programmatic works that matched the strict requirements of more than one level of idiomatic difficulty (thus many of his test pieces served for contests in the lower divisions). This arrangement fits neatly with the style adopted for his own compositions.

The three arrangements by members of the later generation show a much more resourceful use of the available colour palette than is immediately apparent in the work of earlier arrangers. They are also especially interesting because they exploit the music of different style periods and genres.

Elgar Howarth's arrangement of a group of imaginatively titled keyboard pieces by Giles Farnaby (1563-1640), called the *Giles Farnaby Suite*, draws on a long-standing interest in the period of music (the arrangement was made in 1973). It exhibits a remarkable breadth of colour which is given special emphasis by the scoring of two of the five pieces for flugel horn and three trombones. This group of arrangements is, of course, especially convincing because the keyboard and dance repertoire of this period was consciously fashioned for its adaptability for

audiences were variously excited and touched by the performances they heard. Reliable evidence tells us that tens of thousands attended brass band contests, listening attentively and in silence. These audiences soon acquired taste and the capacity to discriminate: a phenomenon that has endured through the age of broadcasting and record production.

The move towards standard instrumentation did not emerge until late in the nineteenth century; indeed, we can tell from the contest application forms that survive for the great festivals held at the Crystal Palace in the 1860s that no two bands had the same instrumentation, and one could go further and say that no two had instrumentations that were especially similar. Standard instrumentation developed out of the success of a small group of conductors who dominated the world of contesting in the last decades of the nineteenth century: John Gladney, a clarinet player with the Hallé Orchestra and conductor of the Black Dyke Mills Band; Edwin Swift, one of the leading band trainers of his generation; and Alexander Owen, the celebrated conductor of the Besses o' th' Barn Band. The formulations these three chose were not identical, but they each subscribed to a few basic principles. The first (an obvious one, but worth restating) was the generalisation that was common across

the brass band world: that, with the exception of the trombones, each instrument would belong to the cornet/saxhorn species, defined mainly in terms of the fact that the instruments had piston valves, and the greatest part of the tubing of each was conical rather than cylindrical. It is this feature that gives the brass band its most distinctive homogenous quality. The second was that the balance of a brass band was best achieved when it was made up of about twenty-five players, with the instruments contributing to a more or less equal voicing across the spectrum of timbres. Thus the effectiveness of any instrument or combination of instruments relied not just on the inherent qualities of the instrument itself, but also on the way it was scored in relation to the general soundscape of the band.

Even in the days when brass bands played the most rudimentary compositions, the repertoire was exclusively made up of arrangements or adaptations of existing works. The most common were derivatives of the classical repertoire, especially Italian opera, the components of which (overtures, arias and so on) had lives well beyond their primary function within opera: publishers sought secondary markets for these derivatives in all sorts of band and drawing-room contexts. It was not until the second decade of the twentieth century that a bespoke repertoire emerged.

Initially and somewhat paradoxically these early pieces had much in common with the pot pourri arrangements they were supposed to replace.

The place of arrangements in brass band repertoire has never subsided, and it would be an error of some proportion to underestimate the value, importance and impact of the arranged repertoire. Two issues are critical here. Firstly, the sources for arrangements were almost always found in the mainstream repertoire, and its performance by brass bands did not just ensure the wide dissemination of that repertoire, it also inspired performances of a very high standard that were often better and more sophisticated than those given by orchestras – especially provincial orchestras. Secondly, and most importantly, the arrangers invariably know the scores of the original music intimately and also know the brass band inside out. It is a matter of idiom – the way that the brass band expresses itself most naturally and eloquently. The best arrangers have helped to define the idiom and have enabled it to develop over time. The selection on this CD provides unequivocal evidence of this, and in their way the arrangements tell a compelling story of the development of idiom.

The selection covers a disparate but important

group of arrangers: Owen, Halliwell, Rimmer, Wright and Ball belong to generations of brass band conductor-arrangers who were responsible for the moulding of the performance style of the brass band in the first half of the twentieth century. Standing outside this group, but contemporary with most of them, is the enigmatic Peter Warlock, a great admirer of the brass band and an advocate for recognition of its position in British musical life. The other group consists of three contemporary arrangers, Elgar Howarth, Howard Snell and Ray Farr. Each of these three has had a significant impact on the development of the brass band since the critical cultural moment in the late 1960s when it moved to the standard pitch denomination from the sharper pitch which had prevailed until then – a collateral consequence of this move was the gradual transfer of most brass bands to instruments of more modern design with a closer relationship to those used in symphony orchestras. As it happens, each of the three has had a distinguished career as a trumpeter in the mainstream of the London music profession – a point not without significance: not only do they know the full potential of brass instruments, but they have been exposed to a vaster range of repertoire than that of the brass band. If there is a quality that stands out in their work, it is that they (and other composers for brass band of their

generation) have managed to develop the idiom further, while preserving its distinction from other forms of brass ensemble music.

The first track exemplifies the fact that the highest standards of arrangement existed when brass band instrumentation was still in the process of formation. One of the unanswered questions about the earlier arrangements concerns the sources for them. Did Alexander Owen ever see *Tristan and Isolde*, or (as is more likely) did he hear the *Prelude* played by the Hallé Orchestra, which had been formed just a few years prior to the composition of the opera? The *Prelude* with Bülow's concert ending was performed in 1859 and published a year later. Owen's arrangements for the Besses o' th' Barn Band, which seem to have commenced in the 1880s, included pieces of huge scale and complexity. This arrangement is undated. He obviously understood every nuance of Wagner's piece as well as he did the idiom of the brass band. He apparently experimented with three flugel horns rather than one (the extra two substituting for one each of the second and third cornets), but the version played in the recording leaves little to be desired.

Järnefelt's *Praeludium* is played here in an arrangement by William Halliwell, another of the

highly successful brass band conductor-arrangers of the early twentieth century. Halliwell conducted most of the major brass bands, including the first, second and third-placed bands at every Open Contest between 1910 and 1913, performing the same remarkable feat at the National Contest of 1912. The piece, originally written for small orchestra, was one of only a handful that make Järnefelt (1869-1958) memorable as a composer, but he was also an important conductor who could properly claim to have introduced the music of Mahler and Schoenberg to Scandinavia.

The *Nabucco Overture* has been one of the most frequent sources for brass band arrangements. It contains so much that invites the brass band idiom: choral writing, lyrical melodies and taxing florid passages. It was being performed as a brass band arrangement in the United Kingdom within months of its first performance in St Petersburg in 1860, but the arrangement here by William Rimmer is one of the first to be set for the modern brass band idiom. Rimmer too was a leading conductor and the only teacher of Harry Mortimer, the most iconic figure of the brass band movement in the twentieth century. Rimmer was a sharp businessman with a formulaic approach to arranging: more than 300 pieces were published under his name or under aliases.