SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1203

20th Century British Music

William Walton (1902-1983) - Constant Lambert (1905-1951) - Arthur Bliss (1891-1975) - Peter Warlock (1894-1930) - Lord Berners (1883-1950): the links that connect the five composers are many, various and sometimes unexpected. Bliss was an early admirer of Berners; Lambert a lifelong admirer of Warlock; Warlock once said of Walton, "That youth will go a long way", though he thought that Lambert had "a much finer intelligence"; Lambert and Berners were both commissioned by Diaghilev to compose ballets for his 1926 London season; Berners, with the Sitwells, was one of Walton's early mentors and Walton helped Berners to score up his ballet, *The Triumphs of Neptune* (the one he wrote for Diaghilev) and dedicated *Belshazzar's Feast* to him. But at the hub of the group was - and certainly is as far as this recording is concerned - one man: Constant Lambert. He it was who gave the first performances of Bliss' three ballets, *Checkmate* (1937), *Miracle in the Gorbals* (1944) and *Adam Zero* (1946); the first performance of Berners' *The Triumph of Neptune* (1926); conducted at the Warlock Memorial Concert on 23 February 1931; and (though three years his junior) was the composer whom Walton acknowledged as the greatest influence on his development as a musician. On this recording Lambert appears in three roles: as conductor, of *Rio Grande* and *The Curlew*; as reciter, in *Façade*; and as composer, of *Rio Grande*. His premature death at the age of 46 in 1951 was indeed a great loss to British music.

Though *Façade* is today regarded as one of Walton's most original works, its gestation was long and tortuous. At the first private performance in the Sitwell's Carlyle Street drawing-room, on Sunday 24 January 1922, 18 items were heard. In the first public performance at the Aeolian Hall on 12 June in the following year, the audience was treated to a mammoth version of 28 items. It was not until 1942 that Walton sorted out his definitive version of 21 items (7 x 3) and not until 1951 that he published the definitive version in its definitive order. Of the 11 items included in this recording (made at the Chenil Galleries, London, on 28 November 1929) only one ("Long Steel Grass") would have been heard at the 1922 premiere. The other ten had been added in subsequent performances: "A Man from the Far Countree", "Valse", "Jodelling Song" in 1923 and "Scotch Rhapsody", "Polka", "Foxtrot" ("Old Sir Faulk"), "Tango" and "Tarantella" in 1926. "Black Mrs Behemoth" and the ever-since-popular "Popular Song" were not included until 1928.

As a genre *Façade* occupies that twilight zone between spoken-word and sung-word, where song meets melodrama. Though Walton refuted the idea that he had been influenced by Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), there is no doubt that he knew the work - indeed he possessed a score - and that in its final version of seven groups of three songs it burlesqued Schoenberg's three groups of seven songs. And when one listens to these early performances by Edith Sitwell and Constant Lambert, one is struck by the closeness of their "recitations" to Schoenberg's Sprechgesang. The differences, however, are equally strong. If *Pierrot Lunaire* is "moonstruck", then *Façade* is "sun-struck"; the work of two young artists who have been (to borrow Noel Coward's phrase) too long "out in the midday sun". In the present recording, Lambert, whom Walton considered to be the best reciter, takes the largest portion of the reciters' cake, with seven of the songs. His

cut-glass pronunciation can be heard at its virtuoso best in "Tango". Edith Sitwell's rounded pre-war English is best savoured in that original *Façade*, "Long Steel Grass". Walton's brisk, no-nonsense direction of the work is ideal for the music's predominantly jazzy textures.

Rio Grande is one of those pieces of music which symbolise an era, in this case the 1920s when the Englishman discovered Jazz. It was written in 1927 when Lambert was 22, first performed by the BBC in February of the following year, Lambert conducting, Angus Morrison as pianist, and given its first concert-hall performance on 12 December 1929 at Manchester by the Hallé Orchestra, the composer again conducting but this time with the Hallé's chief conductor, Sir Hamilton Harty, in the unaccustomed role of soloist. The reception was enthusiastic: "Mr. Lambert transfigures jazz into poetry" wrote Neville Cardus in *The Guardian*, whilst Walton, quoted in *The Daily Express*, lays down his cloak for his friend: "Much better than I have ever written". It was the same group of performers who came together two months later to make the present recording. With *Rhapsody in Blue* and *La Création du Monde*, *Rio Grande* is one of the first important examples of symphonic jazz - which is surprising, for Sacheverell Sitwell's poem, first published in his collection *The Thirteenth Caesar* (1924) evokes, as its title suggests, a South American seaport on carnival day, not a Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Formally the work is a hybrid: a cross between a choral cantata (with occasional solo interjections) and a Lisztian fantasia for piano and orchestra. It alternates between the quick and jazzy and the blues-like and slow, with substantial piano cadenzas in between.

The score that Arthur Bliss wrote for H.G. Wells' film *Things to Come* (1935) is a classic of early film-music. He and Wells decided from the outset that the music was to be an essential part of the main design, not a "trimming" added afterwards. Consequently much of the music was written and pre-recorded before the film was underway. The original recording of the film-track involved 14 full orchestral sessions at the Scala Theatre, London, conducted by the young Scotsman, Muir Mathieson (1911-75). As well as a full symphony orchestra there was a separate percussion band (including several unusual instruments) and a large choir. Bliss promptly made a concert suite from the film-score. It was recorded with the LSO on three gramophone discs, the first four sides conducted by Bliss, the last two taken from the film-studio sessions conducted by Matheson. It is thus a mixture of concert suite and film-studio sessions that we hear on the present recording, beginning with the opening Christmastide ballet for the children, through the scenes of Pestilence, Attack and Ruin, to the famous March, heard first as World War breaks out and the troops are mobilised. The film ends with an Epilogue in which the choir sings as the space cylinder, carrying the two young pioneers inside, starts its journey to the moon. (Curiously, the take used for this side is distinguishable from that included in the film as the choir sings without and with words, respectively.)

Despite the musicality of his poetry, W.B. Yeats had no ear for music except for simple folksongs, and he thoroughly disliked "art-music" settings of his poetry, (His antagonism is said to have been exacerbated by the traumatic experience of hearing his ode to the solitary life, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", sung by a massed gathering of Boy Scouts.) Consequently he had forbidden settings of his poetry without express permission. When in 1922 Peter Warlock "submitted" the songs which were to become *The Curlew* song cycle to Yeats' "musical adviser", they were rejected. This led to a heated public quarrel. In the following year the Carnegie Trust selected *The Curlew* for publication and Yeats had to climb down. Thank goodness, for *The Curlew* is one of the undisputed masterpieces of 20th Century English song. Each of its four poems is set in a distinctive manner, both in shape and texture, but all four are linked together by a sustained elegy of mood. Musically Warlock is at his most radical, both harmonically and texturally. Listen out for the ghostly Sprechgesang which concludes the third song, and the extraordinary interlude that follows, with its piled-up fourth chords and its darkly atonal, almost Bergian sound-world. Lambert, who was to pay homage to his friend with his masterly Piano Concerto (1931), here gives committed, sensitive direction in a recording made only three months after Warlock's tragic death. The performers, except for the flautist, are the same as those who took part in the Warlock Memorial Concert which was broadcast from the Wigmore Hall on 23 February 1931.

The setting of the late medieval *Corpus Christi Carol* was made at the same time as *The Curlew* and inhabits a similar world of mystery and foreboding. The sad melodic lines for solo tenor and mezzo-soprano float above a drone bass and strange, wandering tenths in the inner parts, so characteristic of "Warlock Dolens". The performers on this 1936 recording should be noted: Peter Pears (1910-86) in fine pre-war (and pre-Britten) voice for his first record, shares the solo part with Anne Wood (b. 1907), one of the founder-members of the English Opera Group and co-principal with Joan Cross of the National School of Opera, whilst Leslie Woodgate (1902-61) who started as amanuensis and secretary to Roger Quilter, went on to a distinguished career as conductor of the BBC professional and amateur choruses.

Gerald Hugh Tyrwhitt-Wilson, Lord Berners, one of the century's Great Eccentrics, was a lord-of-all-trades: artist and autobiographer, dove-painter and diplomat, as well as novelist and composer. He has been immortalised by Nancy Mitford as Lord Merlin in her novel *The Pursuit of Love*. Berners' friend Stravinsky described him as "droll and delightful ... an amateur, but in the best - literal - sense." He wrote ballets, songs and piano music, but very little for the concert-hall. His Fugue in C minor was written in 1928 and performed at a Queen's Hall Promenade Concert in September the following year in a programme which included *Rio Grande*. The conductor of "The Symphony Orchestra" on this recording from the same year, John Ansell (1874-1948), was a BBC staff-conductor who specialised in shows, but also conducted symphonic repertoire. He was also a composer of light music, including the once-popular overture, *Plymouth Ho*.

Trevor Hold

Acknowledgements: Thanks are due to Paul Lewis and Adrian Tuddenham for assistance with the production.

The publishers are: Façade Suite - Oxford University Press
Rio Grande - Oxford University Press
Things to Come - Novello
The Curlew - Stainer and Bell
Fugue - Chester

Front cover: Peter Warlock

Copyright Notice: This digitally transferred compilation with its notes is copyright, it may not be broadcast, copied, hired out, publicly performed or stored in a retrieval system without written permission.