The Delius Society
Journal
Autumn  2008, Number 144

The Delius Society
(Registered Charity No. 298662)

President
Lionel Carley, BA PhD

Vice Presidents
Sir Andrew Davis
Sir Mark Elder
Richard Hickox, CBE, FRCO
Bo Holten, RaD
Lyndon Jenkins, RaD
Richard Kitching
Piers Lane, BMus Hon FRAM ARCM LMusA
David Lloyd-Jones, BA Hon DMus FGSM
Julian Lloyd Webber, FRCM
Sir Charles Mackerras, CH, AC, CBE
Robert Threlfall

Website: http://www.delius.org.uk

ISSN-0306-0373
The Editor has tried in good faith to contact the holders of the copyright in all material used in this Journal (other than holders of it for material which has been specifically provided by agreement with the Editor), and to obtain their permission to reproduce it. Sometimes, however, he has received no reply. Any breaches of copyright are unintentional and regretted.
Ernest Proctor: *Sir Thomas Beecham conducting A Mass of Life at Queen’s Hall, 1929* (National Portrait Gallery)
## CONTENTS

**CHAIRMAN’S NOTES** ........................................................................................................................................... 6

**EDITORIAL** .......................................................................................................................................................... 8

**THE SOCIETY’S WEEKEND & AGM 2008 AT CAMBRIDGE** ................................................................. 9

**A MASS OF LIFE:**
- Nietzsche’s Invitation to the Dance of Life *by John White* .......................................................... 12
- An Introduction to the Words and Music *by Hans Haym* ................................................................. 20
- Sir Thomas Beecham on Delius and *A Mass of Life* .................................................................. 25
- Two commentaries: *God or Mountains – Bruckner & Delius* and *Celestial Music?* *by Wilfred Mellers* .................................................. 28
- Eric Fenby on *A Mass of Life* and Religion .................................................................................. 34
- Aspects of *A Mass of Life* *by Robert Matthew-Walker* ......................................................... 38
- A Programme Note *by Eric Fenby* ...................................................................................................... 45
- Origins & early performances *by Martin Lee-Browne* .............................................................. 51
- A Musical Analysis *by Paul Guinery* .................................................................................................... 76
- The ‘La, la, las’ *by Michael Green* ................................................................................................. 88
- Conducting *A Mass of Life*: Matthew Rowe talks to the Editor .............................................. 95
- Two interviews with Roy Henderson:
  - Thus spake Zarathustra ............................................................................................................... 101
  - A Singer’s Point of View ............................................................................................................ 103
- Singing with Sir Thomas *by Francis Russell* .............................................................................. 109
- A Personal Reminiscence *by Lyndon Jenkins* ............................................................................ 111
- The Recordings *by Lewis Foreman* ............................................................................................. 116

**OTHER ARTICLES**
- The French Jaunt *by Malcolm Walker* ..................................................................................... 122
- An Extraordinary Coincidence *by Charles Barnard* .............................................................. 125
- *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*:
  - Second thoughts are sometimes best *by Robert Threlfall* .............................................. 126
  - A review of different orchestral versions *by Tony Summers* ........................................... 129
- Solano Grove – A Rare Discovery *by Bill Thompson* ............................................................ 135
- Delius’s Evening Canticles *by Trevor Hold* .............................................................................. 137

**LETTERS:** *Roger Buckley, Tony Summers, Tony Watts & Rob Sabine* ........................................ 138
DELIUS SOCIETY BRANCH MEETING
London Branch, 10 September 2008 (Michael Green)................................. 142

BOOK REVIEW
Hitchcock’s Music (Sullivan)............................................................................. 144

CONCERTS........................................................................................................ 146
Recital by Susanna Candlin & Oliver Davies (Steinway Hall)
St Giles Orchestra (Oxford)
Recital by Philippe Graffin & Marisa Gupta (English Music Festival)

MISCELLANY.................................................................................................... 149

DELIUS SOCIETY LONDON BRANCH MEETINGS
& OTHER EVENTS 2008-2009........................................................................ 153

EVENTS EVERYWHERE 2007-2009................................................................. 155

Jelka’s Studio at 94 Rue Wilson
(Photo: Jean Merle d’Aubigné)
At the 1980 AGM of The Delius Society, held in Leeds, it was announced that Vernon Handley had accepted the Society’s invitation to become one of its Vice Presidents. As these Notes go to press, we have received the sad news of his death on 10th September. His very first London concert, with the Morley College Symphony Orchestra, included Delius’s *Dance Rhapsody No.1*. That established a pattern, and he was to go on to prove himself a staunch champion of Delius’s music. Dr. Handley was perhaps best known for his advocacy of the music of Arnold, Bantock, Bax, Bliss, Elgar, Moeran, Vaughan Williams, York Bowen and other British composers. His legacy of recordings will, of course, survive forever. An obituary and an appreciation will appear in the next edition of the *Journal*.

Next year sees the centenary of the first complete performances of *A Mass of Life* in London and in Elberfeld. This anniversary is to be marked by at least two performances in this country: at Leeds Town Hall on Saturday 21st March and at the Royal Festival Hall, London, on Thursday 21st May. It occurred to the Committee that the first of these presented a marvellous opportunity to organise a Society Weekend, taking in the Leeds performance and a visit to Harewood House (where we have negotiated a private tour, followed by lunch) on the following day. You will already have received a flyer for this event and, as it promises to be popular and numbers are limited, I urge you to respond to me as soon as possible.

King’s College Chapel, with its superb acoustic – appreciated by Society members attending the last sung evensong of term during the course of the 2008 AGM Weekend – was also the setting for the final event of the annual Cambridge Summer Music Festival on 9th August. A 12-strong unaccompanied choral group, English Voices, conducted by Timothy Brown, performed works ranging in period from the sixteenth century to the present day and included in its programme the two part-songs *To be sung of a Summer Night on the Water* by Delius. Among the singers was soprano Alexandra Kidgell; some of you will remember her as a runner-up in the Delius Prize competition held at the Royal Academy of Music last November.

The final of this year’s Delius Prize, to be adjudicated by our new Vice President Bo Holten, takes place at 7pm on Monday 27th October in the David Josefowitz Recital Hall of the Royal Academy of Music in London. This promises to be a memorable event, and a reception will follow. To obtain tickets, for which there is no charge, telephone the Box Office on 0207 873 7300.
These are my last Chairman’s Notes. As members who attended the AGM in Cambridge already know, Martin Lee-Browne will take over this role on 1st December. In the circumstances, I hope I may be allowed a few personal recollections.

I was one of the many who responded to Roland Gibson’s exploratory letters in 1962, the centenary of Delius’s birth, and I joined the Society the following year. I might have become a founder member but for the twin impracticalities of living in Plymouth and being at that time still at school!

The invitation to join the Committee came in 1994 and shortly afterwards Lyndon Jenkins generously proposed me for the Vice Chairmanship. I took over the Editorship of the Journal from Stephen Lloyd and became responsible for nine editions (Autumn 1996, No. 119 to Spring 2000, No. 127) before succeeding Lyndon as Chairman at the AGM held in Birmingham in 2000. I shall in turn hand over the privilege and responsibility of this office to Martin at the beginning of December and I look forward to enjoying his vision and leadership. To the current members of the Committee, who have provided me with such positive and constructive support, I offer my grateful thanks.

I shall be happy to remain on the Committee for a while (depending entirely, of course, upon the wishes of the membership at the AGM elections) and I hope to make myself useful in the role of Programme Secretary.

Roger Buckley
EDITORIAL

I can never decide whether I love *Sea Drift* or *A Mass of Life* – Delius’s two finest works – the most. Perhaps it’s the one I heard most recently – but having made *Sea Drift* the centrepiece of my third Journal, I cannot resist basing this one around the *Mass*. For people who want to do more than just listen to the music – to get to grips with everything about the work – the text is, however, likely to be a real stumbling-block. It must be true to say that Nietzsche was one of the most original, but most difficult-to-understand, writers of all time. His ideas and philosophy about life have been described in so many different ways and in such different terms that probably no single book or article can give an easily comprehensible resumé of them that can be said to be ‘correct’ or ‘good’ – and I have completely failed to find anything that sets out his basic tenets in everyday language, or, indeed, to find someone who would write something especially for this issue. Nevertheless, I hope that some of the articles here will give Members a better understanding of Nietzsche than they have already. In less exalted terms, I strongly recommend all Members who have a copies of Robert Threlfall’s Catalogue and his Supplementary Catalogue to look at pages 62-64 in the former, and pages 36-37 in the latter, which give a wealth of information about the *Mass*.

By all accounts, the visit to Grez by Members of our Society and the Warlock Society was a great success. It is therefore very pleasing to be able to include two photographs of the Delius’s house at Grez taken by Jean Merle d’Aubigné. He is such a good friend (and Member) of the Society.

This, sadly, is the last Journal I shall be editing. It has been a labour of love, but unfortunately the labour has exceeded the love, and I simply do not have time to do a number of other things for which my retirement was invented. My truly grateful thanks go out to everyone who has contributed to the past seven issues, and now this one – even those whose offerings I have (I hope with good reason) rejected – for it is they who have made the Journal as good as it is. Any shortcomings have been mine, not theirs. Some of them have been coerced into writing something, others have needed only a gentle request for a particular piece, and a few have actually offered material. Similar thanks are due to my wife Diana for her moral support and hours of proof-reading, and to our eldest son, Jeremy, for help with the Society’s recalcitrant computer (or my inability to use it properly) and some proof-reading too. It has been a humbling experience to have been able to gather together so much learned, informative and interesting material.

*Martin Lee-Browne*
Nearly fifty members gathered at The Royal Cambridge Hotel after lunch on 14 June for what was to prove to be another enjoyable AGM weekend.

First on the agenda was what was entitled ‘A Musical Walking Tour of Cambridge’. The musical aspect left a lot to be desired, but the exercise was welcome. At one point we were told that Vaughan Williams and Stanford were undergraduates at Trinity College, further down the road! The college itself, however, we never saw.

By then we were glad to return to the hotel for a welcome tea, to be followed by another walk to Kings College, where we were obliged to queue for admission to Evensong in the chapel. The queue must eventually have numbered over 300 people, many of whom looked as if they were entering
Disney World. Another sign of a disintegrating world, where people are not prepared to dress appropriately for a religious service.

The singing of the choir was super – we had an Introit by Herbert Howells, Canticles by Hugh Blair (a friend of Elgar, who was the Organist of Worcester Cathedral at the beginning of the last century), and an Anthem by Vaughan Williams. In what is one of the world’s ten finest buildings, it was good to hear amateur singing at its finest – the choir is entirely made up of boys, undergraduates and a few graduates still studying at Cambridge.

We then travelled by coach to New Hall – a college (founded in 1952 – then for girls only). Modern architecture at its feeblest – I was reminded of an aquarium! But the champagne reception in the Fellow’s Garden, followed by an excellent dinner, made up for the stark surroundings. After speeches by our chairman, Vice President Bo Holten, President Lionel Carley [in that order – Ed], and our guest speaker Professor Jeremy Dibble, we adjourned to an adjoining room to enjoy a recital by the winners of the 2007 Delius Prize – the cellist Jessica Hayes and her accompanist Christopher White - a fitting end to an action-packed day. AGM activities can certainly be exhausting for the older members. But such a pleasurable exhaustion!

After the next morning started with a hotel breakfast to which, in an academic city, I would award Y-, we gathered for the AGM, dispatched with his customary aplomb by our Chairman. We then had a fascinating talk by Professor Dibble entitled *Style, Form, Idiosyncrasy and Iconoclasm: The Challenge of Delius*. This stretched the mind – as all good lectures should – and we were delighted to learn that he intends to enlarge his thoughts into a book to be published on the 150th anniversary of Delius’ birth, now only four years away.

After more liquid and solid refreshments, we sadly took our leave to return to the outside world - in which the music of Delius gives us so much pleasure. Now we have next year’s AGM to look forward to – a one-day event with the Delius Prize, which means we can avoid another Y- breakfast.

© Charles Barnard 2008
William Blake: *The Ancient of Days* (1794)
(The British Museum)
Friedrich Nietzsche was born at Röcken, near Leipzig in 1844: his father was a Lutheran pastor as were both his grandfathers. When he was five years old his father died and also his only brother - and he then found himself surrounded by an all-female household: mother, sister, grandmother and two maiden aunts. The family moved to Naumburg and into an environment characterised by what he most hated, Piety, Nationalism, Bourgeois Provincialism and domineering women. From 1856 to 1864 he attended the famous Pforta School – previous students included Klopstock, Fichte, Novalis and the Schlegel Brothers – and in 1864 he entered Bonn University, the following year moving to Leipzig, where he continued his studies until 1868.

His professorship at Basel arose from the recommendation of Friedrich Ritschl of Leipzig University who proposed that Nietzsche would one day “stand in the front rank of German Philology... You will say, I describe a phenomenon. Well, that is just what he is...” When Basel accepted him, Ritschl added “if confronted with practical demand, with his great gifts he will work in other fields with the best of success. He will simply be able to do anything he wants to do.”

Nietzsche’s ten years at Basel was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War. Now a Swiss subject, he was barred
from active service, but volunteered as an ambulance orderly and served briefly. This may have led to the considerable deterioration in his health, which eventually forced him into retirement. These years also saw the publication of his first books.

When in 1865, he found, in a second-hand bookshop, a copy of Schopenhauer’s masterpiece *The World as Will and Representation*, he had discovered the first major influence on his future work: the second occurred three years later when he met Richard Wagner. He had sought this meeting through the influence of various friends and when it actually came about it became evident they were both enthusiastic admirers of Schopenhauer. A friendship then developed, in which Nietzsche became an intimate of the whole Wagner family. This intimacy continued for about eight years, but the dissimilarity between the two personalities and in their circumstances - Wagner was fifty-five and at the height of his powers, whereas Nietzsche was only twenty-four and still a student when they first met - meant a rift was bound to develop. Wagner was an “abnormally dominating personality” and had little interest in Nietzsche as a thinker or in his writings. Wagner was only interested in others if they were of use to him and could contribute to his work: nonetheless, he and his wife Cosima were genuinely fond of Nietzsche and baffled when the break eventually came. Nietzsche himself admitted that he had spent some of the happiest days of his life with the Wagners.

In 1879 he retired from the University on health grounds, and was granted a pension. He had realised increasingly that he wanted to devote the rest of his life to his writing. The rift with Wagner had been a shattering experience and his health, which had been poor for years, became so much worse that he was considered likely to die. However, he recovered and most of the remainder of his life was spent in Switzerland, France and Italy. In 1882 he hoped that he had found someone who could be both companion and intellectual heir “A young woman, born in St Petersburg in 1861, unquestionably of extraordinary intellectual and artistic endowment... Lou Salomé.” Their walks and talks together were only to last for a few weeks. Lou Andreas - Salomé was later to become the beloved of the great German poet Rilke, and later still a close friend of Freud.

Nietzsche’s last years were spent in an heroic battle against the increasing ill-health which impeded his desperate need to pour out his thoughts on paper, and a succession of books appeared which were generally ignored. The strain of these years of overwork was too great and early in January, 1889 he became insane, was committed to an asylum in Jena and then released into his mother’s care. On the death of his mother in 1897, his sister moved him to
Weimar where he died on 25 August 1900. In his madness he would have been quite unable to comprehend that he had suddenly become world-famous.

2

In his letter of recommendation to Basel University previously referred to, Friedrich Ritschl described the twenty four year old Nietzsche as “Strong, vigorous, healthy, courageous physically and morally.” From this and from the ferocious invective of his writings, it could be assumed that Nietzsche was overbearing and frightening as a person - but nothing could be further from the truth. “He was softly spoken, mild-mannered, unassertive, all his life. Older women in particular tended to welcome his company because of what they saw as his quiet gentlemanliness and consideration.”

He was shy, about five foot eight, a little stooped and almost blind.

After retirement, Nietzsche lived in modest boarding houses where the Spartan accommodation was matched by his need for the most extreme care over his food and drink, where every transgression would wreak havoc with his sensitive digestion. Stefan Zweig describes Nietzsche’s “small, narrow, modest, coldly furnished chambre garnie” devoid of flowers or decoration; but with a table piled high with “notes, pages, writings and proofs,” and a trunk with “two shirts and the other worn suit. Otherwise only books and manuscripts, and on a tray innumerable bottles and jars and potions: against the migraines - against his stomach cramps, against spasmodic vomiting, against the slothful intestines and above all the dreadful sedatives against his insomnia. Wrapped in his overcoat and a woolen scarf…his fingers freezing…his hurried hand writes for hours - words the dim eyes can hardly decipher.”

It was in these and similar circumstances that Also Sprach Zarathustra and his many later books were composed. Nietzsche describes his state of mind as being when “something suddenly and with unspeakable certainty and purity becomes visible, audible... One hears - one does not seek; one takes - one does not ask who gives... One is seized by an ecstasy, whose fearful tension is sometimes relieved in a storm of tears...” All this is evident enough in the pages of this strange “Book for Everyone and No One” that has become far more famous than anything else he wrote.

3

Thus Spoke Zarathustra occupies a roughly central position in Nietzsche’s output. It was originally planned in three parts: parts one and two were written very rapidly in 1883 and part three the following year. Three more parts were projected and the notes prepared, but only part four was completed in
Edvard Munch: *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1906)
(Munch Museum, Oslo)
In attempting to come to terms with Nietzsche’s thought it is probably better not to begin with Thus Spoke Zarathustra but to follow the wise advice of the Irishman and “start from somewheres else”. However, the following is an attempt to make some of the main points.

God is dead, Nietzsche says, killed by science and rationalism. (The death of God was not of course a new concept, but taken over from the two great preceding Atheist philosophers, Feuerbach and Schopenhauer.) Without God, the universe is meaningless, but men behave as if nothing had changed. Nietzsche was convinced that “The disappearance of God has meant the disappearance of everything for which he was responsible. The basis... of all notions of right and wrong and of good and evil, has been removed. Modern Europe is falling through a void.” In other words, “The culture of Europe was doomed... an eclipse of all traditional values was at hand and modern European man, this pampered child of the optimistically rational eighteenth century, would needs go astray without path or guidance.” This was the emptiness to which Mephistopheles had pointed Faust in the second part of Goethe’s great drama.

Nietzsche’s book, the work of a profoundly lonely man, is his crusade against the Nihilism of the Age. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra he propounds three doctrines, those of the Superman, The Eternal Recurrence and The Will to Power. One of his earlier books had been entitled Human, All-Too-Human and it was this all too human quality which he associated with what he termed “The Mob”; with everything which demeans mankind, and which reduces humanity to an unthinking and servile instrument of others or of the State or of Religion. Man must overcome himself and thus become a Superman or, in a far better translation, an Overman (it must be emphasised that this concept has nothing to do with Darwinian evolution).

The process of “Self-overcoming” is essential to the second doctrine of Eternal Recurrence. Neitzsche’s belief was that time was infinite - a constant in which the Universe exercises its energy - but that this energy was finite in the number of transformations it could produce. These transformations must consequently, in aeons of time, repeat themselves exactly. Everything has already been in existence innumerable times and will be repeated in the future again and again, and so ad infinitum. As Erich Heller puts it, “The deep suffering of the world... is yet surpassed in depth by that rapture of delight which wills, not that the world with its pain should pass away, but that it should last for ever: an eternity not of joy... but of the world with all its sorrow, transfigured in the act of willing it.” R. J. Hollingdale makes a very relevant observation: “It is as if one were on an unending sea journey. The destination
is immaterial since it is never reached.” We now have a new meaning for the last two movements of Delius’s *Songs of Farewell*.

This final doctrine, “The Will to Power” was to have been the subject of a later book: a large number of notes were made but Nietzsche became insane before being able to complete the projected work. The idea derives from Schopenhauer, where the “Will to live” was the overwhelming motive that activated all living beings. The mind was merely an instrument of this will. Nietzsche’s objection was, however, that living creatures will risk their lives in many ways, striving to overcome all obstacles, whether human or otherwise. It is this basic drive that can explain the multiplicity of human actions. After Nietzsche’s death, his sister put his notes together in a completely arbitrary way and published them. She also published his letters with omissions, which distorted their meaning completely. It was through these bowdlerised versions that the so-called “Intellectuals” of the Nazi party used his supposed writings for their own purposes.

Nietzsche was that unusual being: a philosopher with a sense of humour. There is continual word-play; puns abound, as do paradoxes and double meanings. These are tools in producing a vitriolic and often bitterly sarcastic attack on the malevolence and stupidity of mankind individually and collectively. Zarathustra’s endless discourses have to be taken in small doses; too much and one is reminded of Rossetti’s pronouncement on Wordsworth: “Good, you know, but unbearable”. Translation is a major problem, but the text should not read, as in the earlier versions, like a pastiche of the Bible. The English translation used in the score of *A Mass of Life* can be forgiven however as it is no worse than others that were available at that time.

In the midst of all the polemic are passages of wonderful poetry and it was from these that Delius and Fritz Cassirer, whilst on a cycling holiday in Brittany in 1904, made a selection for inclusion in the *Mass*. It will be remembered of course that the final movement had previously been completed in 1898 and was performed at Delius’ London concert in 1899.

It is evident from Eric Fenby’s book *Delius as I Knew Him* that Eric’s Christian beliefs were a source of constant irritation to Delius, on one occasion in particular with the predictable words, “The sooner you get rid of all this Christian humbug the better.” (Strange how one so opposed to dogma of any kind should be so dogmatic.) The following Christmas (!) Eric was given a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the evident hope that the scales would fall from his eyes: nothing of the sort happened as the result of such a well-
meaning but misguided strategy. Eric was very well acquainted with the text of *A Mass of Life*, but was unimpressed with Zarathustra at greater length.

Delius’s hatred of Christianity was in keeping with much of the thought of the time. Wagner had been a follower of Feuerbach, who maintained that nothing exists beyond man and nature, but that religion can reveal truths to us about ourselves. When Wagner subsequently became a disciple of Schopenhauer, the great philosopher’s basically pessimistic view of human existence coloured the remainder of the composer’s output. Surprisingly, this was allied – despite Tannhauser, Lohengrin and Parsifal – to a hatred of Christianity quite as vehement as in the case of Nietzsche and Delius. Nietzsche, of course, having an early enthusiasm for Schopenhauer, subsequently came to reject him completely because of the negativity of his philosophy. Nietzsche regarded religion as being equally objectionable in promising future illusory happiness as a reward for present suffering and as a means of denying us the ability to live life to the full in the joyful acceptance of the present moment.

It is worth mentioning that as well as Wagner, an early follower of Feuerbach was Gottfried Keller, the author of *The People of Seldwyla*, one of the few books for which Nietzsche had a high regard – and it was from this collection that Delius took the story of *A Village Romeo and Juliet* and made it into his finest opera. It is debatable however, whether Nietzsche would have found much to admire in the text Delius used as a basis for his *Requiem*. This platitudinous poem (perhaps better in the original German) is attributed to Heinrich Simon, a friend of the Deliuses: as his name does not appear in the score, it might be supposed that he preferred not to be reminded of it. Indeed, it reads as though it could have been, at least in part, written by Delius himself, as it is of interest as a compendium of Delius’ own beliefs. Delius told Ernest Newman that “It was written rather in the style of the old (sic) Testament(!).” Zarathustra would doubtless have found that amusing.

Eric Fenby’s Christmas present came with a note in which Delius said: “I myself do not subscribe to everything Nietzsche said, but I hail in him a sublime poet and a beautiful nature.” That was well said and *A Mass of Life* is both a tribute to and a celebration of a tortured and misunderstood genius.

---

3 Kaufmann: ibid, p12.
4 Bryan Magee: ibid, p301.
5 Kaufmann: ibid, p104.
6 Nietzsche: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* - trans. R.J.Hollingdale: (Penguin Books, 1961,
A Mass of Life - and I can imagine Delius’s dry remarks on framing the title - is a choral celebration of the Will of man to say “Yea!” to life in certain joy of the ‘Eternal Recurrence’ - Nietzsche’s perennial theme - in face of the Christian slaying of self to gain the promise of Life Eternal. His is the music of that Nietzschean joy as felt by Delius in virile manhood; spontaneous and careless of Wagnerian inflections that still continued to haunt him momentarily; the music of a sensitive, restless adventurer, a tireless walker and climber of mountains; not yet the perpetual harper on transience who reached uniqueness in its musical expression in the full ripeness of his later years.

Eric Fenby – From the programme note for a Royal Philharmonic Society concert on 5 December 1984.
A modern composer who sets out to write a work on an extended scale, but which is neither operatic nor symphonic, will experience some difficulty in his choice of a subject. It is no longer so natural to choose a religious one as it was formerly, when art was closely bound up with the church. In those days the highest aim of a composer was the setting of sacred words. The masses of the Catholic Church in particular – the Missa solemnis – and the Missa pro defunctis – although they had been set hundreds of times before, never failed to attract him afresh. For although they contained some intractable elements that were not amenable to musical treatment, the essential parts of them were intensely charged with human emotion, which musicians were again and again inspired to mould into new and individual forms. Thus Beethoven, after writing his nine magnificent symphonies, crowned the edifice with his Missa Solemnis, Verdi gave us the last mass of importance in Latin, and Brahms gave us his Deutsches Requiem.

And now we have A Mass of Life! A certain contrast to the Missa pro defunctis is implied in its very title. The composer would seem to say to us, “Many Requiems have been written to commemorate the dead, let us now dedicate a ‘Mass’ to the living! Whole generations of artists have employed all
the constructive imagination and warmth of feeling they possessed in order to depict the horrors of Hell or the consolations of Heaven; let us now sing a new song, in praise of our Life here on earth!"

A composer, looking for suitable words with such ideas in his mind, would almost inevitably come to think of that passionate and eloquent “advocate of Life”, Friedrich Nietzsche, and of his greatest work Also sprach Zarathustra. This marvellous book, written in language of great poetic beauty and power, contains an apotheosis of life ideally suited to the musician’s purpose. In its delineation of scenes from nature it reveals imaginative moods ranging from the tenderest lyrical musings to the heights of ecstasy, from dark melancholy brooding to the joyousness of laughter and dance. In its speculations it traces the mystery of Being down to the very roots of the Tree of Knowledge and up to its sun-lit topmost branches; and in its outlook on future possibilities of life it combines prophetic fire with a sense of human frailty.

In this Mass it is not the composer’s intention to set philosophical ideas to music, but merely to select and use fragments of Zarathustra as subject-matter for a number of evocative musical pictures. Nietzsche is not concerned
with exact science: his soaring ideas are not the product of an uninspired intellectualism, but the result as it were of a desperate mental struggle, a battling with problems of ethics and the metaphysics of religion. They could therefore not be stated in the cold formalism of prose but call for heightened expression through the medium of poetry. “Zarathustra” was conceived “in a state of tension and inspiration” – to quote Nietzsche’s words – “such as I had never yet experienced”, and whatever may be our judgment about the value of its philosophy, at any rate it can lay claim to poetry of a very high order. Nietzsche the poet will command our admiration even if we do not share his views, and we shall understand how it is this master of the German language has exercised a lasting influence on modern musicians.

As stated above, Delius has only used fragments of the text, and no attempt is made to weld these fragments into a whole, either by the insertion of narrative or by any other device. It is true that the chief solo part in Delius’s work (the baritone part), is allotted to the chief figure in Nietzsche’s book, but beyond this Delius uses the text with complete freedom, giving Zarathustra’s words sometimes to the three other soloists or the chorus. J S Bach exercised the same artistic freedom when he wrote his Magnificat, not for a single female voice, but for soloists and chorus.

I should particularly like to emphasize the fact that the only proper standpoint from which to judge the work before us is the purely musical one. Delius has been put down as a programme musician whose strength lies in his use of colour. Nothing could be more erroneous. We may grant that here and there in his symphonic poem Paris (the chief work of his ‘Storm and stress’ period), there are some very realistic outbursts of musical impressionism. Since that time, however, he has more and more consciously restricted himself to a mode of musical expression, which, though it may not be the only one, is certainly the most important of all – the portrayal of human emotion. It is strange that at the very time when a mature view of art condemns excessive representationalism in painting and leaves our vision free for what is really paintable, music, mistaking its own nature, seeks to go beyond the purely musical, clings to externalities, and wastes its capacity for looking inwards in attempting to describe events and objects of the outer world. It is well known that this error lies at the root of many of the ‘most brilliant’ modern orchestral works. It is not shared by Delius. His talent is an intensely and genuinely musical one – musical in the truest sense of the word: the outer world does not intrude on his world of sound, except in so far as it undergoes that mysterious process, by which all external impressions are transmuted subjectively into a vibrating medium, into just that fluid psychic condition, which we call mood.
Should any doubt have prevailed hitherto of this intrinsically ‘musical’ nature of Delius’s music, the Mass of Life will dispel it, not only by reason of the pre-eminently intimate nature of its poetical subject, but also in view of the way in which this subject is handled, both as a whole and in its parts.

And these are some of the descriptions:

There could be no greater contrast to [the big chorus at the start of Part Two] than the intimate character of the remarkable baritone solo that follows, “Lyre, my solace, come enchant me!” Just as the poetry of these beautiful words is incapable of being paraphrased and put in sober logical language, so too the music, which reminds one of distance, or the croaking of frogs, or waves, almost at every point defies analysing its half-mystical, half-naturalistic charm.

The following number [Part 2 (III)] for four-part female chorus and large orchestra, is based on the “Dance-song” in the second part of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, where it reads, “One evening Zarathustra walked through the forest………, he came to a green meadow surrounded by trees and bushes; there were maidens dancing with one another”. The picture which Delius gives us of the dance; of its changing intricacies, its song and laughter; of the maidens with fluttering veils and flowing hair, seeking one another, joining together and breaking apart – a dance palpitating with life, or sobered by tender melancholy; the soft swaying movements of its close – all this is illustrated by Delius in one of the most original and harmonically complicated pieces of music imaginable. A wonderful Lento in 4/4 time, with the strings divided in many parts, conjures up in our minds the atmosphere of the evening and the lonely meadow with its long shadows thrown by the setting sun: it is a modern counterpart of Bach’s Am Abend da es kühle war.

It is impossible to enumerate in detail all the subtleties in Delius’s illustration of Zarathustra’s words [in the middle of that movement], which recall the kindly and humorous language of Hans Sachs.

“But when the dance had ended”, says Nietzsche, “and the maidens had
departed, he became sad. The sun has long been down, he said at last, the meadow is moist, coolness comes from the forest” and thus the vivid scene which, at its climax, had unloosed the full volume of orchestral sound, ends as it had begun, with the stillness of evening…………Delius delights in such elegiac closing passages, and adorns them with the most haunting turns of melody, the most unexpected harmonies, and the tenderest touches of orchestral colour.

The words of the last two numbers of the work are taken from the “Song of Rapture”….., which contains the mystical idea of the “eternal re-birth of all things”, and elaborates it in lofty and at times enigmatic language. Music here plays a fitting role as interpreter of things that cannot be put in words, and Delius has succeeded in writing an ending of solemn and monumental grandeur to his work.

Delius composed a dream opera [A Village Romeo & Juliet]; like his Mass of Life, it is not for extroverts; it is all inward-looking, or rather inward-feeling. I do not mean that it is introspective or concerned with abstractions. Delius’s music is intensely human and passionate; but it is as though all passion and sense have been drawn into and through Delius’s fine-spun imagination, and changed to poetry. There is no prose in it; it is all vibrations, vibrations of happiness, ecstasy, foreboding, pity, loneliness, resignation.

Neville Cardus: Talking of Music (Collins, 1957)
During the last 70 years, no composer has aroused so much discussion as Frederick Delius. There seem to be no half-shades of opinion about his music. One either admires and loves it, or despises and condemns it. There are manifold reasons for this sharp separation of conviction on the two sides, but the principal ones are the almost entirely underivative character of the music and its rejection of virtually the whole of the traditional methods in composition which prevailed roughly between 1700 and 1875. Firstly as regards what I have termed the underivative side of this composer’s genius, I do not mean to suggest that he is wholly independant and self-supporting. No similarity can be made between him and that useful but perhaps unfortunate animal, the mule – of whom it was once said that he enjoyed neither pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity. In his earlier works there are to be found, as in those of every other composer, slight phases of the influence of his elder contemporaries. But these are purely incidental, and he never wrote a single piece, even at the beginning of his long career, of which it might be said that it was in the style of another. It is this high dissimilarity to any other music known to us that has
been the greater stumbling block, both in the adequate performance of it and its wider reception by the greater public of all countries.

Yet in spite of this disability, there has been generated in the two chief Anglo-Saxon communities a by no means inconsiderable minority of devotees. This fortunate – ah, consummation – has been effected largely through the media of the gramophone and the radio – and it is possible now to assert that this substantial minority has been increasing annually during the post-War period. One therefore may be justified in claiming, not that this is the music of the future, but rather that there is a future, and perhaps a big one, for this music. It would be wasting your time and mine if I were to point out details wherein lie the many differences in method and style, as well as inspiration, between this music and any other known to us. Any intelligent listener can hear that for himself; it is more to the point to insist that the guiding force behind everything that this man wrote was the influence of Nature. No musician before him – or since – has been, or is, so closely in communion with all the outward manifestations and inner significances of that part of the universe that was not made by Man. Music for the past 250 years has largely been an urban affair, and has concerned itself with the utterances and practices of those who live in cities and towns. Its origins lie in the Dance and the Song. Both of these in the hands of the greatest composers are highly sophisticated matter.

Frederic Delius placed the daily doings of his fellow creatures against the background of a larger and more mysterious world. This does not mean – of course – that his music was in any way de-humanised. On the contrary, it is informed by a romance and a passion that is none the less potent for being delivered with less rhetorical emphasis than that of other composers. One of the main criticisms directed against him is that there is too much likeness of mood in nearly all that he has written. This is partly true – but the same might be said of many other men of genius, including Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Schuman and so on. But the keener ear – which it is a pleasure to note is being developed in the younger generation – can distinguish a hundred subtle differences in his interpretation of the endless shades of the great world of Nature. This variety is perhaps most recognisable in the largest work he ever wrote outside his operas – namely A Mass of Life – of which a recorded version is now – ah – offered to the public. Some might ask why a Mass of Life. The answer is that it is wholly concerned with existence in a living world in apposition to that which, in the ecclesiastical Mass, is conditioned by beliefs inherent in the promise of a life to come. The whole work under consideration is an affirmation of the joys to be found in Man’s span of life on this planet,
and on no other. That much of this joy is won by serene contemplation of the outer beauties of the Universe, be they rivers, mountains, sunrises or sunsets, does not invalidate its argument for pleasure of an exalted kind. The composer rejects in total any suggestion that human happiness is necessarily manifested in terms of feverish excitement and mass uproar. In the fourth number of the second part of the work, the principal character, Zarathustra, is heard to say “My Soul, how little thou needest to be happy.” Everyone is, of course, entitled to express his own opinion on any work of art, be it a piece of music, a poem or a picture. All criticism is nothing than the personal view of one very fallible mortal. I may therefore, in view of my long association with this composer, be permitted the indulgence of declaring my own faith in his, and my admiration for this particular piece of his – *A Mass of Life.*
It’s an interesting reflection that, in their finest moments, Bruckner and Delius have much in common: interesting because superficially it would seem that they are polar opposites, allied only in both being late romantics. Bruckner was, we’re told, a simple soul, born into a rural community. A man of God, whose art was devoted to God’s glory, he also, perhaps collaterally, had a deep respect for tradition and had no overt desire except to follow in the steps of the masters (especially Beethoven and Schubert). Delius, on the other hand, was a complex character, born into an industrial community, frequenting sophisticated circles in Paris. Animated by a fanatical dislike of God and of established musical traditions, he disapproved of almost all music except his own. Believing that fulfilment of self was the only valid goal, he was ruthless both morally and artistically in pursuit of it.

That this opposition is over-simple becomes evident as reflection deepens. If Bruckner was so unequivocally God-dedicated, why did he spend the greater part of his working life – after his apprentice years as a church musician – composing symphonies, since the sonata-symphony, far from incarnating a ‘faith’, is concerned with Becoming, with growth through conflict to hard-won resolution? How is it that Bruckner developed a reverence for the arch-egoist and sensualist Wagner no less obsessive than his worship of the classical masters? It rather seems that his greatness springs from the fact that he is a divine Pool: though one born into a rural, feudal, Catholic Society grown repressive and moribund, so that his vision of bliss is undermined by psychological disturbance. He discovers his paradise, and wonderful it is; but to reach it he needs the structural Becoming of sonata. As a religious-mystical composer he’s thus closer to late Beethoven than he is to Bach; his adagios can sustain comparison with their model, the Adagio of Beethoven’s Ninth – a work which Bruckner considered the ultimate height of human achievement.

Given all this, it isn’t surprising that Bruckner conductors are born rather
than made. To interpret him adequately calls for a rare synthesis of visionary innocence in the lyricism, epic grandeur in the structural proportions, and sensuous instability and stress in the chromaticism and enharmony. Bruno Walter wasn’t as quintessentially a Bruckner conductor as he was a Mahler conductor; he’s slightly too sweet or too frantic, missing the heroism. But there’s more to any Walter performance of Viennese music than to most men’s, so it’s good to have a reissue of his performance of Bruckner’s Fourth with the Columbia Symphony (CBS61137, 29s 10d): I’ve seldom heard the tremolando and horn calls of the famous opening sound more magical: only the complex architecture of the great finale seems lacking in monumentality and momentum.

Delius never wrote a symphony, dismissing the form as by his time obsolete, a refuge for withered academicians. He did compose a Mass: though of course it’s a ‘Mass of Life’, setting Nietzsche’s celebration of human potency,
courage and endurance in face of the inescapable fact of mortality. It’s Delius’s biggest work and, partly for that reason, not his best. Whereas Bruckner started from submission to tradition and became profoundly original in extending it in ways that his immense melodies demanded, Delius, starting \textit{ab ovo} from his own passions (which none the less sometimes implied identification with Wagner), could achieve fulfilment only so long as he was ‘inspired’. Often he was - notably throughout \textit{Sea Drift} (in which he identifies with Whitman’s childhood revelations of loss) and in \textit{The Song of the High Hills} (where he’s alone with Nature, and the wordless chorus yearns in pentatonic ecstasy for a bliss which the sensual chromatics would deny). In the Mass there are comparably marvellous moments (for instance the sublime Lento in Part II); but there are also passages in which, inspiration flagging, Delius becomes parasitic on the very academic, Teutonic-British, choral-symphonic tradition he held in contempt. Both at his best (because he’s so waywardly personal) and at his worst (because he then needs help in papering over the cracks) Delius too demands a special kind of conductor, sensitive to the flexibility of the Delian line: for the sumptuous harmony depends, more than Wagner’s, on a flow of independent parts, always soaring, seeking some pre-harmonic, paradisal wholeness, haleness and holiness.

This brings us to the common ground (or perhaps it’s uncommon sky) between Delius and Bruckner. The vision they both see or hear, whether in cathedral or in mountainous solitude, is prelapsarian and Edenic. If that’s their romanticism, it’s also the quality that makes them universal; they’re both boundless in their wareness of the cravings of the fallible, human, heart. Beecham’s supreme gift as an interpreter of Delius was to reveal this suprapersonal vision within a composer more idiosyncratic than most. His performance of \textit{A Mass of Life} with the RPO and London Philharmonic Chorus (CBS 611 82/3 29s l0d) comes up, in this dubbing, as freshly sonorous, tensely strong even when the music is most heart-breaking. None the less, grateful though one is for its reissue, there should be a new recording. Time passes, as Delius knew, and he’s no longer an unfashionable composer; on the contrary his music appeals to today’s young both in its distrust of Establishment and in its simultaneous rejection of materialism and of God.
CELESTIAL MUSIC?

[These are excerpts from the section in Celestial Music? - Some Masterpieces of European Religious Music (The Boydell Press, 2002) titled From the ‘Death of God’ to ‘The Unanswered Question’, pp 181-185]

[Sea Drift] is a – perhaps the – essential religious experience: despite the fact that Delius did not believe in God and was contemptuous of people who affected to embrace any creed invented in his, her, or its name. Unsurprisingly, Delius abominated English oratorio, deprecating the time Elgar wasted on it, though he offered a crumb of comfort in admitting that Elgar wasn’t as desperate a case as Parry, who would have set the whole Bible to music had he lived long enough. Yet even so, Delius composed two works that couldn’t have existed but for the tradition of English oratorio. The earlier of them, A Mass of Life, was begun at the turn of the century and finished in 1904, the year of Sea Drift. It is his biggest work, and possibly his greatest, though it is not as completely fulfilled as Sea Drift and his later choral and orchestral masterpiece, significantly titled The Song of the High Hills. Certainly, the Mass is Delius’s most comprehensive testament wherein he identifies himself with his hero Nietzsche, celebrating man’s ‘high courage and self-reliance’ in the face of his own irremediable death, and of Nietzsche’s ‘Death of God’. For man to be totally self-responsible is an ultimate exultation, and an ultimate terror. Delius carried fanatical belief in the self to a point at which he could tolerate no music but his own — except possibly that of late Wagner to which he owed so much, and that of a few younger composers who had dedicated works to him. This, if magnificent, is also foolhardy; to carry it off an artist needs to be consistently inspired: which, over the not-far-off-two-hour duration of A Mass of Life is asking a lot. But although Delius is not quite equal to the challenge, he produces enough inspired music to win the day. Despite the post-Wagnerian idiom, the evocations of the stillness of summer noon and of midnight are as original as they are heart-rending; while the opening and closing choruses remind us, in surging impetuosity and in control of the vast paragraph, of the young Delius’s superabundant energy, which so potently animated his nostalgia. Both the life-celebrating virility and life-transcending nature-worship are musical equivalents of Nietzsche’s Also sprach Zarathustra which furnished Delius with his text, set in German. Since the magic of such music may be explained only as an act of faith, it is not surprising that there should be a parallel between the monumental choruses of State-supporting but God-aspiring Elgar in his Gerontius, and these monumental choruses of a composer
who professed to believe neither in God nor State, but only in himself.

The opening chorus of *A Mass of Life* is in several senses breath-taking. The immense sweep of the paragraphs; the wide range of the vocal parts; the freedom of their chromaticism which remains vocally grateful because ‘spontaneous’ pentatonic formulae recurrently inform the tonal exuberance, the complementing of the vocal parts by orchestral lines that are, despite their chromatics, vocal in contour; and the sheer luxuriance of the orchestration: all these make for a dizzying affirmation of Life which needs quoting in full score if it is to be adequately meaningful. Nothing could be more remote from the image of Delius – old, frail, blind, paralysed in his wheelchair – that has become part of the popular imagination. Delius was around forty when he composed this music, which is a sublimation of his handsome Byronic youth, with heart pounding, pulse beating, blood seething. One might even say that this chorus is Delius’s quintessence, the prime source of the virility from which his life and art sprang. Yet since he was on his own admission a ‘pagan’, fulfilment of the senses and of corporeal desire implied too a recognition that ‘fulfilment’ involves an acceptance of our ephemerality and of the inevitable loss of the beloved such as is the heart of *Sea Drift*. Perhaps a notion of the paradoxical religious atheism of Delius can be best revealed by way of commentary on the final movement of Part I of the work, and on the early sections of the Second Part.

While the common view of Delius as a psychologically regressive composer can never be adequate, since his evocations of the life-force attain such glory, this epilogue is unique in his music: a prelude to life’s seasonal renewal wherein non-Western, quasi-Balinese sonorities are harbingers of what’s to come – including the ‘oriental’ elements in Holst’s *Hymn of Jesus* and in the ‘magic musics’ of Vaughan Williams’s final phase. The difference between this new Delian *ex-stasis* and his earlier exultations (such as the opening of the *Mass of Life*) is that the new music has relinquished the earlier music’s willfulness.

Yet although the myth of the blind and paralysed Delius, recollecting in tranquillity in his garden at Grez, discounts the Byronic magnetism of his youth, there is nonetheless allegorical import in that Delius, crippled, became a spectator of his own imaginative life. His nostalgia, and its complementary nature-mysticism, if ‘limited’, are also perennial and universal experiences: which is why, though his weaker works have faded, those in which inspiration flowered remain impervious to fashion. We may admit that the experience by
which he was obsessed is unlikely, in our technology-dominated societies, ever again to seem as significant as it did during the first two decades of the twentieth century, when Delius was most vigorously creative. On the other hand, it is also unlikely, in any foreseeable future, to be meaningless. No welfare state, nor even the Kingdom of Heaven, can appease the unsatisfied cravings of man. Although Delius would have expunged the ‘wretched’, he wouldn’t have apologized for the pride, and his ‘message’, albeit from a confessedly irreligious man, was in the deepest sense spiritual, and also religious, though it totally denied the bondage etymologically inherent in the word.
When, at last, after weeks of enquiries and disappointments, I was able to peruse the vocal score of his *Mass of Life*, I had stood spellbound in the little music-shop in the main street of my native town as I read that soul-stirring and original passage for solo contralto which, rendered into English by Thomas Common, reads:

O Zarathustra! Beyond good and evil found we our island and our green meadow – we two alone! Therefore must we be friendly to each other! .... O Zarathustra, thou art not faithful enough to me!

There is an old heavy, heavy, booming-clock: it boometh by night up to thy cave: When thou hearest this clock strike the hours at midnight, then thinkest thou between one and twelve thereon - Thou thinkest thereon, O Zarathustra, I know it – of soon leaving me!

As I read on, a cold thrill ran through me at the magical entry of the chorus basses singing *sotto voce*:

O man! Take heed!
What saith deep midnight’s voice indeed?
‘I slept my sleep – From deepest dream I’ve woke and plead: The world is deep,
And deeper than the day could read.
Deep is its woe – Joy – deeper still than grief can be:
Woe saith: Hence! Go!
But joys all want eternity – Want deep, profound eternity!

and my musing continued until long after the solo soprano’s tender and exquisite close:

And we gazed at each other, and looked at the green meadow o’er which the cool evening was just passing, and we wept together.

I knew nothing of Nietzsche. It was the music struck me to the heart so that I
could scarcely think of anything else for days. Thus, by the merest chance, on my first handling of a Delius score, I stumbled on the very pages that contain the musical pith of all the composer has to say.

[Pages 6-7]

Since those days when the stillness of nature had first calmed the troubled waters of his soul, [Delius] had known in his heart that he had something to give, something to say about life in terms of music that no one else could give or say. This noble urge which stirred him so strangely was the only spiritual thing in life for which he had reverence, and this remained unto the end of his days.

The second call, as he himself confessed, was a call to a much more complicated being than the mere boy who had sailed for Florida. That first call had been the call of the boy to the man in him; the second call should have been the call of the man to the boy in him. But it was the call of the man to the man in him, the call of Nietzsche’s super-man, Zarathustra.

[Pages 164-165]

As I see it, it is a tragedy that [Thomas] Ward’s influence [on Delius when he lived in Florida] was a purely musical one. Would that, together with those seeds of musical culture, Ward could have sown but a few of the Catholic culture, not so much as to make his pupil a Catholic, but, at least, a believer; for with belief there would have come that joy which is not to be found in his music, and which constitutes its chief defect. What joy there is, is as an echo through the ages of the joys of pagan antiquity – the joy of the gods, and the delight in all natural things before the world was born again. It is tinged with the sadness with which all joy must be tinged that is not born of that virtue which Christianity brought into the world – hope. And there is no hope in Delius’s music.

“Lift up your hearts, my brethren, high, higher!” sings Zarathustra in the Mass of Life, “and do not forget your legs! Lift up also your legs, ye good dancers, and better still if ye stand upon your heads! This crown of the laugher, this rose-garland crown: I myself have put on this crown, I myself have consecrated my laughter.” For all this, he cannot exult, nor can he dance, and the faintest flicker of a smile never crosses his face.

Despite its undeniable grandeur, its strength, its moving passages of
ravishing beauty, when the poetry of both poet and composer is at its most musical, I have never yet come away from a performance of the Mass of Life without feeling depressed. I am not alone in this. Several others have had like experience. Better, as one of them said, somewhat irreverently, had it been called the Mess of Life.....

.....When, one wet day, a few years later, he was looking for something to read in the library of a Norwegian friend with whom he was staying during a walking tour, and had taken down a book, Thus Spake Zarathustra - a book, for all and none - by one Friedrich Nietzsche, he was ripe for it. That book, he told me, never left his hands until he had devoured it from cover to cover. It was the very book he had been seeking all along, and finding that book he declared to be one of the most important events of his life. Nor did he rest content until he had read every work of Nietzsche that he could lay his hands on; and the poison entered into his soul.

Given those great natural musical gifts and that nature of his, so full of feeling, and which at its finest inclined to that exalted end of man which is contemplation, there is no knowing to what sublime heights he would have risen had he chosen to look upwards to God instead of downwards to man! It was just the difference between upwards and downwards, but what a difference! “Ye look aloft when ye long for exaltation, and I look downward because I am exalted,” says Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. It is this looking downward that chains Delius’s music to the earth.

There are many for whom this music is too much of the earth earthy. None would have complained had it been too much of heaven heavenly, for no music can be too heavenly. It is the lack of heaven in the minds of its creators that is the curse of music. As yet we have no standard of comparison by
which the truth of this may be judged. Oh, for a modern Palestrina to breathe into the voices of the modern orchestra the music of that joy of joys, that blessed felicity that would transport us with an earthly tasting of eternal bliss!

If, following the way of the great Christian contemplatives, Delius had chosen to look aloft, he would have brought heaven to earth, for, constructing music as he did by feeling alone within the structure of his particular sense of form, and with his delicate touch and refinement, he would have been the perfect composer for those long flights of musical felicity which none have attempted, yet which I pray I may hear in some composer ere I die. Such music, when it comes, will be the music of Eternal Life.

It is a confession of the utmost spiritual poverty of soul to maintain, as so many moderns maintain, that the possibilities of music have been exhausted. Of the higher realms of spiritual exploration music has said very little; of the highest realm, next to nothing at all. This is strange, yet not strange. Strange, because music is of all the arts the one and only art that can give expression to the mystery of heavenly things, the one language in which the inexpressible is expressible, and not strange in that the creation of the kind of music that I am trying to define, and in which Delius would have excelled, would demand rare qualities of mind and disposition in the soul of the creator.

[Pages 170-173]

“No, my boy, it’s no use” concluded Delius, “You’ll never convince me that music will be any good until it gets rid of the Jesus element. It has paralysed music all along.”

I argued that I did not see how a disciplined intellect in the harness of a strong and simple faith could harm any artist. Besides, one could not dismiss the religious experiences and intuitions common to men of all ages as things unworthy of consideration, but Delius merely replied that all artists were “best rid of such nonsense.”

The following Christmas he sent me a copy of Thus Spake Zarathustra with the accompanying note “In introducing you to Nietzsche my intention is to open up new horizons to you. I myself do not subscribe to everything Nietzsche said, but I hail in him a sublime poet and a beautiful nature. I want to make myself very plain to you as regards religions and creeds. Personally I have no use for any of them. There is only one real happiness in life, and that is the happiness of creating.”
A MASS OF LIFE

ASPECTS OF DELIUS’S A MASS OF LIFE

Robert Matthew-Walker

‘Fire and art, those two great powers, which, when combined, make God’s world ours.’

I

If it is not quite true to claim the superlative in describing Delius’s A Mass of Life as being the longest concert work written up to the time of its completion in 1905, then it certainly has to be counted amongst the handful of such large-scale scores as its performance time requires, that is to say around 1 hour, 45 minutes in total duration. The mere fact of its great length indicates, even to the most cursory observer, that in this work Delius set himself a challenge of the most considerable dimensions. By that time, Delius had composed five of his seven operas, so he clearly felt he was up to a task which would have stretched his powers of invention in the concert hall to the limit, but there is indeed – there had to be – another factor which led him to tackle such a work on such a scale. In a word, that factor was inspiration.

Delius was born in 1862, and from his earliest years until his final months in 1934 (in the last period of his life, as recalled by his amanuensis Eric Fenby), both as man (as we learn from his surviving correspondence) and artist (as we know from his published music) – Delius was regularly drawn to, and inspired by, nature in all its forms, in a way that is not, for example, found so consistently expressed in the music of many of his close contemporaries, such as Debussy (also born in 1862), Richard Strauss (born 1864) or Elgar (born 1857), and rather less so in the music of his older contemporaries. In many respects, therefore, it would be difficult – if not impossible – to name a composer whose inspiration was more readily fired by the contemplation of Nature (with a capital N) than Delius. Admirers of the music of Sibelius (born in 1865) may claim a not dissimilar response on his part (perhaps not unconnected with both composers’ affinity with Scandinavia – though for Delius the impact was greater because he was the outsider; for Sibelius it was inborn), but Sibelius’s response – important though it was in his art – was certainly not more significant than that of the Englishman. And in any event, the Scandinavian connection can be exaggerated; Delius’s view of Nature was broader.
Although it was true that in a wider sense such an approach to artistic creation was ‘in the air’, as is said, around the dawn of the twentieth-century, Delius responded to it wholeheartedly – indeed, from within his own character, he could do no other. One might argue that, say, Debussy’s La mer and Nocturnes – even perhaps his early Printemps – show his response to natural phenomena, and that Richard Strauss’s Eine Alpensinfonie is the most self-evident example of his response; in addition, we know of Elgar’s life-long love of the Malvern Hills in his native Worcestershire – but that it not the point. With Delius, as to a somewhat lesser extent with Sibelius, a lifetime’s affinity with, and constant finding of inspiration in, the vastness and majesty of Nature in his concert music (we should exclude Delius’s concertos, of course, but do we know the sources of their inspiration?) produced a series of works of constantly-changing expressive subtleties. Equally, however, this is not to say that human activity is never found in Delius’s concert works (one may cite Paris on the one hand and Appalachia on the other, and it may be difficult to divine Nature exclusively in, say, the two Dance Rhapsodies), but the notion of a Delian equivalent of the Symphonia Domestica is absurd. For Delius, the mise-en-scènes of day-to-day human activity are confined to his operas – and he himself wrote the libretti for half of them.

The expanses of Nature as phenomena constituting a background and occasionally – as in the case of In a Summer Garden – a foreground in Delius’s orchestral music, are not merely to be found in Over the Hills and Far Away, the North Country Sketches or The Song of the High Hills, for he was far too comprehensive an artist not to relate such phenomena to human aspirations, but when he broadened such bases in his concert music, (and he did not do it so often) his inspiration was almost always initially fired by the impact of a pre-existing text.

It was Christopher Palmer who first described Delius as a cosmopolitan in print, and a little-remarked-upon aspect of the composer, arising from Christopher’s point, is that Delius’s word-setting embraced at least five different languages, possibly more than in the case of any other major composer (Delius never set a Latin text, not even in his Requiem, although in that work the chorus does intone a fragment of a Muslim text – so, stretching the point, that could make six languages).

II

A major impact on Delius’s life was his encounter in the mid-1890s – through the encouragement of Jelka Rosen – with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. In Nietzsche, Delius, on his own admission, found a kindred – indeed,
contemporaneous – spirit: the philosopher was to die in 1900, aged 56. As early as 1898, Delius had composed his *Mitternachtslied (Zarathustra’s Night Song)* for baritone solo, male voice chorus and orchestra, a positive musical response to the German’s philosophy. In some respects, the further selections that Delius, with his colleague Fritz Cassirer, made in 1904 from Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra* to set in German as *Eine Messe des Lebens* (the usual published English translation was by John Bernhoff; I shall hereafter refer to the work by its English title) made a natural progression from that relatively early work to the apogee of A *Mass of Life*; after that, Delius could go no further. In another respect and at some years’ distance, and equally not solely in terms of size, *A Mass of Life* is his equivalent of Elgar’s claim, ‘this is the best of me’, which he appended to the final page of the manuscript of The *Dream of Gerontius*.

Of course, Delians may argue (and I would not wholly disagree with them) that *A Mass of Life* is neither necessarily, nor consistently, the best of Delius’s vocal music – in the opera house *A Village Romeo & Juliet*, and in the concert hall *Sea Drift*, both have their out-and-out admirers (myself included). By way of a slight detour, the mention of *A Village Romeo and Juliet* brings up the question of the continuing and shameful neglect of Delius’s operas by our native companies, especially those organisations whose remit is to perform opera in English; such a mention should also cause us to consider Delius’s understanding of the technical and expressive qualities of the human voice, so supremely exercised in the solo and choral writing in *A Mass of Life*. In his major concert music, Delius is surely unique amongst composers in that well over 40% of his output in the genre utilises voices, perhaps even embracing *en route* the speaker in *Paa Vidderne* and the shouts of the orchestral players in *Eventyr*. Nor, of course, does this genre include Delius’s not inconsiderable output of solo songs and part-songs, but it does mean that by the time of the composition of *A Mass of Life* his understanding and mastery of the task in hand was complete – here stands his largest artistic statement for the concert-hall, on a truly epic scale.

What this surely implies is that a composition lasting around one hour 45 minutes in performance demands, above all, a coherent structure if the work’s occupation of such a time-scale is to be unified fully and convince the listener (who is, after all – we suppose – the ultimate object of Delius’s creativity). For, with human voices, Delius speaks to us directly in the concert-hall – in *A Mass of Life* there is no ‘story’, as in *Sea Drift*, but at heart a philosophical dissertation of the loftiest kind; clearly, indeed self-evidently, Delius’s structure has to be founded upon the strongest ground-plan.

At the time of writing this, I am looking forward to reading Paul Guinery’s
analysis of the work in musical terms, and it is not to pre-empt what I have
every reason to believe will be an excellent job of work on his part that I invite
the reader to consider three – vital – facets of Delius’s musical journey. If you
have access to a score, look at the first page and then turn to the last. You will
see that the work begins in F major and ends in B major, and one does not
have to possess a detailed knowledge of harmony to realise that with such
a juxtaposition of keys there is an initial implication that the work clearly
undergoes an immense musical journey from start to finish – for these two
keys are the farthest apart from one another as they can be. It is apparent, from
such fore-knowledge, that Delius at the outset is preparing to embark upon a
vast odyssey, one which has to be underpinned and supported at all times by
his large-scale powers of invention. How he does this, in purely musical terms,
I leave to Paul’s analysis, but what we should consider now is the second of
those three facets – one which is hardly ever remarked upon, although it is
staring us in the face. This is the very title of the composition – ‘A Mass of Life’.

‘A Mass of – Life’? Those familiar with the words of the Eucharist (for the
music-lover, perhaps more commonly encountered in the Latin) will know that,
as a sequence, it does not readily conform to what one might call symphonic
structuralisation, despite almost all of the great settings of the Catholic mass
having been written by the greatest symphonists – Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven,
Schubert, Bruckner, especially. The constituent parts of the Mass are: Kyrie,
Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei, and the longest parts are the
Gloria and Credo – clearly frustrating the structurally concerned symphonist.
Up until Bruckner’s time, and possibly a little later, composers – certainly across
continental Europe – would have had every reason to believe that the majority
of their audience were churchgoers and would be familiar with the Latin text
from regular observance. The text of the Mass, with perhaps a slight change
of order in the latter parts, remains of course the same for all composers –
Bruckner set the same texts as did Haydn and Mozart one hundred years
before, and with the words, in whatever language the Mass is celebrated, the
character of each section is pre-ordained – the Kyrie is supplicatory, the Gloria
triumphant, and so on – so no composer can change the meaning of the words,
with the result that by about bar six in any setting (apart from those by the
aforementioned great composers) of any part, we know what we are more
than likely going to be in for, and it is a brave man in this day and age who
takes on that mighty handful of composers.

The problems confronting a symphonic composer in undertaking a setting
of the Mass are considerable in terms of structural balance. Delius was never,
in the formal sense (he was far too original a figure), a ‘symphonic’ composer as
were his contemporaries Mahler, Sibelius and Nielsen (none of whom wrote a Mass). Any formal ‘problems’ such a composer may have encountered simply did not exist for him. In tackling such problems, various composers have tried, with varying degrees of success, to ‘shoehorn’ those parts, unequal in length, into a symphonic structure. Perhaps the most successful in recent times was George Lloyd, whose *Symphonic Mass* (his title) manages to achieve a close approximation to a multi-movement symphonic structure, unified by thematic integration, but even so the hand of the non-believing composer betrays a lack of faith. Dame Ethel Smyth’s *Mass in D* goes so far as to alter the sequence of the Mass, making the *Gloria* the concluding movement, and a composer such as Vaughan Williams (who incidentally never quite seemed to grasp Delius’s music, despite being indebted to him for a letter of introduction to Ravel), whose *a capella Mass in G minor* is the product of a non-believer, demonstrated that it is perfectly possible for an agnostic to be inspired by timeless words of great beauty and nobility of style, even in the Latin texts.

III

What is remarkable – and with our third facet we enter a larger world of contention – is how, in the passages they selected from Nietzsche, Delius and Cassirer at times appear to make the text stand against the sections of the Catholic Mass, as in a *missa parodia*. In this regard, in Parts One and Two of *A Mass of Life*, we seem to be witnessing consecutive celebrations of a Mass (not ‘the Mass’ but ‘a Mass’). Is it possible that this is deliberate? On the one hand, it would seem to be most unlikely, but on the other no-one can say for sure (except the out-and-out atheistic Delian). None the less, the text of *A Mass of Life* can be shown to mirror sequences of a Christian Mass to a degree, and I invite the interested reader to investigate them for himself, with the result that the ethos of the work is revealed not as some atheistic affectation but as a statement of alternative belief in no way less deeply held than that of the most devout Christian.

Let us return to the title of the work. If – as has been suggested (by Hans Haym) – the very title of *A Mass of Life* itself implies that the work is a mirror-image of (or, given Delius’s character, a challenge to) ‘A Mass for the Dead’ (i.e., a Requiem), the use of the word ‘Mass’ in the title can be said to reflect (here, surely unwittingly) the Latin phrase *Ite, missa est ecclesia* – ‘Go, the congregation is dismissed’ – which is said, or sung, at the end of the service, the *ecclesia* itself, outside the celebration of the Mass, also referring to a popular assembly where the people, not God, exercise full sovereignty. In this sense, one with which Delius would certainly agree, we have a democratic celebration of human – on
the one hand temporal and on the other everlasting – life, outside of organised religion. And, in this regard, references to Zoroastrianism – the ancient religion founded or reformed by Zoroaster (Zarathustra) nails the colours of Nietzsche and Delius to the human mast of eternal belief, in that Zoroastrianism was the first religion to place its faith in a single god. Nor is there in Zoroastrianism a belief in an after-life; in essence, for followers of Zoroaster, life on earth is perceived to be a one-way ticket.

Such a belief, for those who have studied Delius’s own life, will immediately strike home as being that towards which his own life was moving (in most respects already inhabiting) by the time he came into contact with Nietzsche; no wonder Delius was so inspired by it and moved to create his largest concert work – a statement of belief, I repeat, no less firmly-held than that of the most devout follower of Christ, made more paradoxical by the view that, as Ernest Newman said, “while his music seems to glide along with limbs relaxed, it is often, in reality, extraordinarily vigorous, as many a page in A Mass of Life testifies.” A concert work on this scale frequently has to exhibit extraordinary vigour – an energy driven by inner belief.

In A Mass of Life we encounter a self-standing, utterly unique, structure on an epic scale, but not so removed from our experience as to render it unintelligible. Not only is this just as well, but also it fell to Delius, amongst all major composers of his generation, that perhaps only he could have attempted such a work. There is no doubt that the inspiration for it stemmed from that inner belief – which, as we have shown, has aspects in common with those of such religious revelations as have been given to Man in the course of the evolution of his creative intelligence – and, from Man’s own observations, the evolution of his belief. With such an outlook, Delius could not argue, the more so through his life-long communion with Nature, against the opening words of St John’s gospel (much though it would have pained him to acknowledge the fact): “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Zoroastrianism equals one God, one Word. Thus spoke Zoroaster.

I am well aware that such a claim may cause eyebrows, as well as perhaps some hackles, to rise amongst the more hedonistic Delians, in addition to those of the more restrained music-lover. Those who have read even the barest outline of Delius’s life know full well that he was centrifugally not a religious person, but equally his inherent beliefs as a human being were such as to cause him continually to be profoundly moved and influenced by that which he saw and experienced in Nature.

Perhaps Delius was himself aware of the conflicting paradoxes which drove
him. As Cecil Gray observed, Delius was a doctrinaire atheist, who “professed to despise England and everything English, living his entire life abroad; yet, in the last days of his life it was his expressed desire to be laid to rest in an English churchyard.”

In his reading, we know that Delius was thrilled to the core on coming into contact with Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra* – here was the codification in a written text of the composer’s instinctive feelings. Within ten years of that initial contact, he had produced in *A Mass of Life* the one work of his above all that burst upon the musical world with the force of a detonation, a work utterly original and consistent in terms of its unique and powerfully expressive compositional style. So self-confident is the composer, so fired by his inspiration throughout this music that in a fine performance the sympathetic listener cannot fail to be inspired by (in Sir Thomas Beecham’s words) Delius’s “affirmation of the joys to be found in man’s span of life on this planet.” No other composer came close.

© Robert Matthew-Walker 2008

The Deliuses at Langham Hotel, adjoining Queen’s Hall, when they came to hear *A Mass of Life* in the 1929 Festival
A MASS OF LIFE

A PROGRAMME NOTE*

Eric Fenby

“It would be possible to consider all Zarathustra as a musical composition,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche, pondering the great riddle-like prose poem he had finished in 1885. Clearly, no sound-board was more attuned to deepen the ring of Nietzsche’s metaphors than the musical imagination of Frederick Delius. The suggestive power of its first response to poetic fragments from Zarathustra – the Midnight Song given at the Delius concert in London in 1899, and later to become the spiritual axis of A Mass of Life – is so compelling that progression to the work in its present dimensions can be seen to have been inevitable. Zarathustra is Nietzsche’s conception of man at his highest as an individual. His sayings, biblical in style……..affirm his doctrine of the man of the future; man as Superman; proud, energetic, dominant, exceptional in his truthfulness, disdaining as weakness, as Delius did, the old values of Christianity. “I want to make myself very plain to you as regards religions and creeds. Personally I have no use for any of them. There is only one real happiness in life, and that is the happiness of creating.” Thus Delius to the writer.

A Mass of Life – and I can imagine Delius’s dry remarks on framing the title – is a choral celebration of the Will of man to say “Yea!” to life in certain joy of the ‘Eternal Recurrence’ – Nietzsche’s perennial theme – in the face of the Christian slaying of self to gain the promise of Life Eternal. This the music of that Nietzschean joy as felt by Delius in virile manhood; spontaneous and careless of Wagnerian inflections that still continued to haunt him momentarily; the music of a sensitive, restless adventurer, a tireless walker and climber of mountains; not yet the perpetual harper on transience who reached uniqueness in its musical expression in the full ripeness of his later years.

The Mass is divided into two parts in a balanced sequence of eleven soliloquies devised for Delius by his friend Fritz Cassirer, the German conductor who gave the first performance of Koanga in Elberfeld, A Village Romeo and Juliet in Berlin and Appalachia in London. Cassirer, like Delius an ardent lover of Nietzsche’s poetry, selected such passages from Zarathustra as seemed most apt to the lyrical expression of those singular traits he had divined in Delius’s musical temperament. The singers share the words of Zarathustra, personified in the baritone soloist, declaiming, now meditating
or mingling dynamically as human instruments in the quieter orchestral textures. The score calls for four soloists, double chorus and large orchestra.

Part One

I. [This] opens without preamble with a passionate choral invocation to Zarathustra’s ruling compulsion. He longs to transcend all the pettiness of life, so that in his prime he may face in his soul whatever his inmost soul may demand. The music gathers a massive strength and holds it in determined purpose, briefly relaxing for further effort which Delius uses his powers to sustain in urging Zarathustra’s plea.

II. In a short, lilting baritone solo, Zarathustra exhorts all men to lift their hearts and limbs, and dance as the wind rushes and the sea rises each to its own music. All greater men should learn to laugh, for laughter is holy.

III. Tenor, soprano and contralto soloists comment on Man as lover, pursuing his loved one, Life. Life dances enticingly before Zarathustra to the swaying rhythms of female voices; the pulse quickens and the double chorus joins in fugue-like impetus rare in Delius. The chase gives way to more tranquil mood and, in a moving contralto solo, Life appeals to Zarathustra that they should love each other. The basses enter in a hushed intoning of the Midnight Song and the bell tolls faintly in horns and harp. Life and Zarathustra look tearfully on each other as the cool evening shades fall on the green meadow to exquisite harmonies in the strings.

IV. Misgivings, even despair, follows upon these ponderings as Man shrinks before the Riddle of Life. His misgivings are heightened by dark forebodings in the orchestra and doleful interjections and a loud questioning outburst from the choir. He must listen to what the solemn midnight hour is saying! Baritone and basses close with this murmuring.

V. Cold tones of clarinets, astringent bass oboe and bass clarinet blend with French horns in evoking the mood of mysterious night. The basses whisper and soon the warmth of string tone glows as the baritone feels his very soul to be one with the awakening songs of lovers. The contrast between his light of heart and the dark of night persists in the imaginative writing for strings and the alternation with wind timbres which merge in a glorious emotive climax that ebbs to a snatch of a song of a lover in the fading voices of the choir.
Part Two

I. [Likewise, this] begins with an orchestral prelude: *On the Mountains.* Zarathustra is alone with his thoughts in the stillness: horn calls echo over the distant valleys. Then, like a sudden storm at sea, the chorus erupts extolling the freedom of Man’s prime of life. The soloists exult in summer’s stillness “close to the eagle, to sun and snow”, and the sea music is heard again in a great longing, “O harden yourself, my heart!”

II. In a moving song for baritone, Zarathustra now communes with his lyre in sad reflections from the past evoked by dream-like melodic lines and musing harmonies in the orchestra.

III. It is evening and the philosopher is wandering through the forest. Presently he comes upon a clearing where young girls are dancing. Their charming intricacies of step and gesture are suggested in the rhythms of their four-part song, wordless in laughter and fluttering delight. The girls are startled on seeing Zarathustra. Reassured, they resume in wilder dance, then tire, leaving Zarathustra to his thoughts. Their voices come from afar and his reverie dims with a sigh in strains of haunting poignancy.

IV. Zarathustra, in the felicity of noon-tide, lies down on the grass and falls asleep under a tree. Shepherd pipes sound from beyond a four-part canon for oboe, cor anglais and bass oboe, and the sense of timelessness pervades the scene at the quiet chorus entry. Zarathustra stirs, and eventually soloists, choir and orchestra stretch their limbs in joyous outburst. Nowhere is the genius of Delius more subtle and sensitive than in the visionary significance of the winding passages for strings that ensue. The myriad voices of Eternity seem to live again in the hovering chords of the choir’s “O Happiness! O happiness! The ancient noonday sleeps!”, and the music dies in mystic calm.

V. Zarathustra, now in the evening of life, ponders the past and the indifference of men. The chorus pursues this mood of regretfulness and the climax comes in the great unison at the close, “Joy is deeper than sorrow!”

VI. The music of this final sequence resolves the spiritual and emotional issues of the Mass with overwhelming grandeur. The orchestra tells of approaching midnight. Zarathustra calls his friends to wander in the cool air, and when the loud clamour of the heart is stilled he will whisper
what the solemn midnight bell has revealed. The bell tolls in the violas
and cellos….continuing in the higher strings as Zarathustra reveals its
message – “Joy is deeper than the heart’s unease! Joy longs for time
without end!” The paean to Joy rises, transporting in sound to die away
rapturously into the night.

* For a concert of The Royal Philharmonic Society in The Royal Festival Hall on 5
December 1984.

Blur

Readers might also be interested in Philip Heseltine’s article (with notes
on the music) in the programme book for the 1929 Delius Festival,
reproduced in DSJ 94 (Autumn 1987).

William Blake: Whirlwind of Lovers (1824-1827)
(Birmingham Art Gallery)
Frederic Austin’s copy of the 1907 vocal score
EINE MESSE DES LEBENS
FÜR SOLI, CHOR UND GROSSES ORCHESTER
NACH NIETZSCHE'S ZARATHUSTRA
ZUSAMMENGESTELT
VON FRITZ CASSIRER.

KLAVIERAUSZUG MIT DEUTSCHEN WORTEN VON OTTO SINGER
ENGL. WORTE V. JOHN BERNHOFF.
MK. 16. NO.
PRICE 8/- NET.

VERLAG HARMONIE,
BERLIN.

LONDON: BREITKOPF & HäRTEL
84 GREAT MARLBOROUGH STR. W.
A MASS OF LIFE ——

ORIGINS AND EARLY PERFORMANCES

Martin Lee-Browne

In 1898, Delius composed *Mitternachtslied Zarathustra* (often referred to in concert advertisements and programmes, but not those for its first performance, as *Das trunkene Lied* or *Das Nachtlied Zarathustras*), an eleven or twelve minute piece taking up 33 pages of full score, for baritone solo, chorus and his usual large orchestra (including triple wind plus cor anglais, bass clarinet and contrabassoon, a bell in Eb and two harps). It is a setting of extracts from Part IV of Friederich Nietzsche’s enormous philosophical treatise, part prose and part poem, *Also sprach Zarathustra* – which he described as “the deepest ever written” – and it was dedicated to Delius’s cousin, Arthur Kröenig (notwithstanding the fact that Kröenig had written to Delius “I consider Nietzsche quite unsuitable for musical treatment.”¹). Many years later Jelka was to write:

I remember an evening while Fred was still working in his empty room downstairs, when he called me and Ida² to hear a song he had written to words of Nietzsche. It was the ‘Mitternachtslied’ from Zarathustra: ‘O Mensch! gib Acht!’ etc. and formed the nucleus of the great ‘Mass of Life’. It was quite wonderful. We sat on cushions on the floor, and Fred at the piano with a flickering candle played to us that solemn and intense song ‘…Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit…’; the greatest yearning of humanity was expressed so beautifully, and I was overcome with the wonder of it all, that in my house this had been created, that Fred was so gifted and had all his life before him to create such beautiful things. I resolved to give him all help and assistance in my power.³

The work – Delius’s first choral one – was included in the programme for the famous St James’ Hall concert of first English performances of Delius’s music on 30 May 1899, conducted by Alfred Hertz. At that time there were no ‘corporate’ orchestras in London, so, following the standard practice, the one for this occasion was made up of professional players selected from those working in and around the city – at a cost of £233, or around £12,000 in today’s money; there was a small professional choir and a large amateur one, and the baritone soloist was the then quite well-known Douglas Powell. No doubt to Delius’s enormous relief, a substantial number of the reviews were favourable.

Notwithstanding the relative success of that concert – the expenses for
which he had to bear personally – it did not in fact generate more interest in his music in England, and even after it he continued to find it impossible to get further performances here. He had to wait until he met Beecham in 1907 for that to happen – so he turned to the Continent. In 1900, he tried, but failed, to interest the conductor Artur Nikisch in the piece – in a letter to Ida Gerhardi he said “I cannot quite understand why such a good musician should be scared by Zarathustra”.4 Julius Buths was the conductor at Elberfeld between 1879 and 1890, and he was followed by Hans Haym, who was to become Delius’s strongest advocate in Germany; on 13 November 1897, Haym had given the first performance of *Over the Hills and Far Away*, and:

Professor Julius Buths, Musikdirektor in Düsseldorf and a great friend of Dr. Haym’s in Elberfeld, came over for this concert, and altho’ he was rather forbidding and critical, one could notice that he was very interested. A year or so later, Fred sent him the score of his ‘Midnight Song from Zarathustra.’ Buths went to great pains studying it, and to this end copied out the whole orchestral score. In the end he wrote to Fred that he could not in all conscience perform it.5

In a letter to Jelka on 25 October 1900 Delius wrote:

I went to Düsseldorf this afternoon & had a chat with Buths, who is a very nice man. He promised to look at my things later in the season but his programmes were already settled for this season. I took Zarathustra with me & will send it to him later on….

although there is no evidence that (despite Buths’ apparent ‘feel’ for Delius’s music) a performance resulted. Delius’s next hope was Siegfried Ochs (1858-1929), the conductor of the Berliner Philharmonische Chor, and when Delius was in Berlin in November 1900 he wrote to Jelka and Ida Gerhardi: “I shall go to Ochs tomorrow morning with Zarathustra – But really hope for nothing here”6, and he was proved right, as he found that Ochs was away.

At last, however, *Mitternachtslied* had its second performance and its first in Germany, when Haym gave it at Elberfeld (now Wuppertal) on 15 November 1902, with Delius (not surprisingly!) in the audience. Another German conductor, Max Schillings at Bayreuth – who thought the work “very interesting and Stimmungsvoll”, and who had hoped to programme it, but in the event was unable to do it himself – recommended it to the Swiss Hermann Suter, who conducted it at the Tonkünstlerfest in Basel on 12 June 1903, again with Delius present. Haym was very keen to know how it had gone7, and Delius must have written to Grieg telling him about that performance, for Grieg wrote:

Congratulations on Basel! Do send me the piece when it comes out. What a
pity it is from “Zarathustra”. I have to think of Strauss, and I have no stomach for Strauss!”

to which Delius replied:

I don’t need to tell you my Mitternachtslied has absolutely no relationship with the Strauss Zarathustra, which I consider a complete failure.10

Mitternachtslied was never published in its original form – so the few performances that it did have would have been done from the manuscript full score and copyists parts.

Delius started composing Ein Messe des Lebens (A Mass of Life) in 1904, and by May one of the two Tanzlied (Dance Song) movements was finished. As is the case with virtually all his works (including the Mitternachtslied), in his published correspondence he says nothing at all about the ‘gestation process’ for the work. Delius’s other great German conductor-friend Fritz Cassirer gave him much help with the words – the title page of the scores generously says “nach Nietzsches Zarathustra zusammengestellt von (”put together with”) Fritz Cassirer” and, undoubtedly as a direct result of that, the work is dedicated to him: “Meinem Freunde Fritz Cassirer gewidmet”. Nevertheless, Delius evidently showed it, or at least part of it, to Haym at an early stage:

Dear friend,

I am still completely unable to come to terms with your “Tanzlied”, therefore have given up my intention to rehearse it with a few ladies, at least for this summer…… As soon as your choral work is ready, I’ll get a look at it, won’t I? Can you tell me why the “Tanzlied” just doesn’t appeal to me? It seems quite different from your other things. I just don’t know how to grasp it, however much I would like to do so. Thanks for your letter and best wishes to your dear wife.

Yours Haym11

The words were taken from Parts II, III and IV of Also sprach – and Delius used a very slightly altered version of the entire Mitternachtslied as part of the last movement of the whole work, with the final big choral outburst “Alle Lust will aller Dinge Ewigkeit” (Cue 132) added at the end. As usual with Delius’s choral and vocal music with orchestra, the words were printed in German and English, and Delius had originally wanted the writer and critic Alfred Kalisch
to do the translation. However, on 6 May 1907, his publishers, Verlag Harmonie of Berlin made another suggestion:

We regard the fee which Herr Kalisch wants for translating as extremely high and advise looking for another translator. We have a very good English translator available, in the person of Mr John Bernhoff, and think that he would certainly not ask the fee of Mk800 which Herr Kalisch wants.

In a letter to Delius a month later Henry Wood wrote to Delius:

I believe that John Bernhoff is a very clever man, and hope that he will make a great success of the translation of your work into English. I need not say I have looked through your score several times with the keenest interest….

and in the event Delius went along with them.

With the printing about to begin, however, he must have been somewhat taken aback to receive this:

5.7.7.
Blankenese bei Hamburg
Parktrasse 22

Dear Sir,

I have noted from the newspaper enclosed that you intend to bring out a choral work under the title “Lebensmesse”. Presumably you do not know that I have published a choral poem under the same title, and that this title was invented by me personally; the word “Lebensmesse” did not exist in the German language before. My poem has also been set to music several times; admittedly none of these compositions has yet been performed, but negotiations are in progress. So it is as much in your interest as in mine that you should choose another title for your work. I am very sorry that I must ask this of you; but you will realize that I cannot waive my copyright. Moreover you will easily find in Nietzsche himself a title which fits your Zarathustra choral work as well, or even better. In any case I hope that, as an artist whom I highly esteem, you will sympathize with the embarrassing position I am forced to take up, and not take my request amiss.

Yours very sincerely

Richard Dehmel.

N.B. I should like a reply as soon as possible.

Dehmel (1863 – 1920) was a poet, and very sympathetic towards Nietzsche’s philosophies. If Delius did reply – which, in the circumstances seems unlikely
– his letter has, sadly, not been published.
The autograph full score (now in The British Library) is dated August 1905, and
it was published, in two volumes, in 1907, a year before the first performance.

The 1907 full score
(“Aufführungsrecht vorbehalten = “Performing rights reserved”)
(Photo by courtesy of Lyndon Jenkins)
The vocal score – with the piano arrangement by Otto Singer (1863 – 1936, a choral conductor who worked in Leipzig and Berlin) was published at the same time:

He wrote to us that it would appreciably diminish the amount of work he had to do if he received two scores to make the arrangements from. He would then not have to copy the choruses but could just stick them together and set the piano part underneath. [An early example of cut-and-paste! Ed.]......We envisage the production for the Mass as follows: We will have the English translation made from the original score and entered on it and we will then have the hand-written reproduction printed, from which Herr Otto Singer can make the piano arrangement.

but curiously, although the contract with Singer was signed in April 1907, some copies of the vocal score are dated 1907 and others 1908. Delius’s relationship with his publishers was almost always a ‘love-hate’ one – and there was much wrangling with Harmonie over the Mass. Readers will enjoy the letters between them in Robert Montgomery and Robert Threlfall’s extremely entertaining and absorbing book on the subject.14

By now, there was considerable interest in the Mass on the part of Delius’s conductor-friends – Fritz Cassirer wanted a copy of the score15 - and, much more importantly, Max Schillings told Delius “Your Mass score has just arrived, now I will see that it is secured for the Festival.”16 The Festival was the 1908 Tonkünstlerfest of the Allgemeine Deutsche Musikverein in Munich – and Schillings was almost as good as his word, for on 1 April 1908 he had to write to Delius telling him that:

I am afraid that it is impossible to perform the whole of your work. Ludwig Hess and his choir cannot master it all; for that, months of rehearsal would be necessary, and you know yourself how enormous the difficulties are for a choir which is not composed of professional musicians. Hess suggests Part 2. Please get in touch with Ludw. Hess München, Kaulbachstr. 93 & arrange details with him (assuming that you agree to a performance of parts of your work). The question of soloists is extremely important. Whom do you suggest for the baritone part? He must be a first-class artist. The question of the material is also important. Provisionally Hess has borrowed the choral material at his own risk. But as you know, the A.D.M.V. cannot acquire the material for the works it performs as it has no use for it. So some agreement with your publishers would have to be reached through your intercession. Please write to Hess about that too. — I hope you agree to our plan, so that we shall have the pleasure of bringing your work to the public, to begin with in parts. I look forward to it very much.
Within a week, Delius wrote to Hess – who replied:

A thousand apologies for not answering your very friendly lines of 7th April until today, and then only dictating via typewriter. I have been so unbelievably overburdened by my threefold work that there is simply no other way,

Your “Messe des Lebens” is one of those works where I have the feeling that there is such power and vitality in it that for the artist who renders it, putting all his power and love into it must make it an intensely rewarding experience for him. Rest assured that the preparatory work will be pursued with as much conscientiousness as pleasure on the part of all concerned.

With reference to the choice of soloists, I was unfortunately not able to wait for the wishes expressed in your letter, as the Festival is so close at hand and the Theatre management in particular had to know as soon as possible. However, I have chosen for each of the four solo parts the person I considered to be most suitable, taking into account poetic, musical, vocal and intellectual qualities, to be precise, for the most important part the baritone Rudolph Gmür, whom I consider to be the most highly gifted interpreter of parts of real character, for the contralto part, Else Schünemann or the very talented young Olga von Welden, for the soprano Fraulein van Lammen or Frau Grumbacher de Jong. I hope you agree; I chose according to the best of my conscience.

Now for two other important matters.

Firstly, please send me as soon as possible a fair copy of your score, as your manuscript is illegible from a certain distance.

Secondly, I can only perform the Tanzlied if you agree to its being performed by the two lady soloists and ten of the best female voices from my choir, in other words as a threefold quartet; because on 4th May we have a performance of Liszt’s Missa Solemnis and Bruckner’s 150th Psalm, and four weeks later your work has to be christened in fitting style! That is a physical impossibility, even for a Choral Society that has been in existence for 100 years. Please let me have your view on this; I can imagine the effect would be very pleasing. Finally another minor artistic scruple: I fear that the frequent repetition of the word La La spoils the sonorities of the Mädchentanz; could you possibly agree to a cut there? Please write to me soon.17

It is not surprising that Hess realised that he would be unable get his choir to master all their music, for 100 years later, the Mass is still extremely difficult for even an experienced chorus.

So, the first performance of the Mass was directed, not by one of the conductors who were doing the most to introduce Delius’s music in Germany, but by the relatively unknown Hess.18 It was given in the Odeon at Munich
ZUM 44. TONKÜNSTLER-FEST
DES ALLGEMEINEN DEUTSCHEN
MUSIKVEREINS IN MÜNCHEN

Das diesjährige Tonkünstlerfest (die 44. Jahresversammlung) des
Allgemeinen Deutschen Musikvereins findet in München in den
Tagen vom 1. bis 5. Juni statt. Außerdem sind die Mitglieder bereits am
30. Mai zu einer Opernvorstellung im Künstlertheater der Ausstellung
ingeladen.

Das Programm lautet, mit Vorbehalt etwa noch nötiger werdender
Änderungen:

Samstag, den 30. Mai, nachmittags:
Vorstellung im Künstlertheater der Ausstellung.
Chr. W. Gluck: „Die Maienkönigin“.
Hermann Bischoff: „Tanzlegendchen“ (nach Gottfried Keller).

Sonntag, den 31. Mai:
soilen Führungen durch die Pinakothek, das Nationalmuseum und durch
die Ausstellung veranstaltet werden; bei genügender Beteiligung könnte
nachmittags auch ein Ausflug in das Isartal oder an den Starnberger See
veranstaltet werden.

Montag, den 1. Juni, nachmittags 5 Uhr:
Festauflührung im Prinz-Regenten-Theater.
Friedrich Klose: „Ilsebill“.
Im Anschluß hieran, abends 8 1/2 Uhr, offizielle Begrüßung der
Festteilnehmer durch die Stadt München im alten Rathaussaal.

Dienstag, den 2. Juni, vormittags 10 Uhr:
Öffentliche Hauptprobe zum ersten Orchesterkonzert.
Abends 7 1/2 Uhr:
Erstes Orchesterkonzert (Stuttgarter Hofkapelle) im Odeon.
Ernest Schelling: Suite fantastique für Klavier und Orchester.
Jan van Gilse: „Erhebung“, Symphonie No. 3 für eine hohe Sopran-
stimme und großes Orchester.
Max Schillings: „Glockenlieder“, vier Gesänge mit Orchester, op. 23.
Mittwoch, den 3. Juni, vormittags 11 Uhr:
Erstes Kammermusikkonzert im Saale des Hotels „Zu den vier Jahreszeiten“.
Karl Pottgießer: Quartett für zwei Violinen, Bratsche und Violoncell.
Georg Vollrath: Lieder.
Walter Braunfels: Fünf Bagatellen aus op. 5 und drei Studien aus op. 9 für Klavier.
Georg Vollrath: Lieder.
Kurt Schindler: Lieder.
Henri Marteau: Kammersymphonie (Octette symphonique) für Flöte, Klarinette, Horn und Streichquintett.
Nachmittags 5 Uhr:
Festauflührung im Prinz-Regenten-Theater.
Max Schillings: „Moloch“.
Donnerstag, den 4. Juni, vormittags 10 Uhr:
Öffentliche Hauptprobe zum zweiten Orchesterkonzert.
Nachmittags 3 Uhr:
Hauptversammlung im Saale des Museums, Promenadestraße 12.
Abends 7 1/2 Uhr:
Zweites Orchesterkonzert (Münchner Hofkapelle) im Odeon.
Frederick Delius: „Eine Messe des Lebens“ (Zweiter Teil) für Soli, Chor und Orchester.
Wilhelm Berger: Zwei Gesänge mit Orchester (noch fraglich).
Freitag, den 5. Juni, vormittags 11 Uhr:
Zweites Kammermusikkonzert im Saale des Hotels „Zu den vier Jahreszeiten“.
Karl Kämpf: Lieder.
Roderich v. Mojsisovics: Lieder.
Kurt Schindler: Lieder.
Paul Juon: Trio-Caprice (nach Selma Lagerlöf’s „Gösta Berling“) für Klavier, Violine und Violoncell, op. 39.
Nachmittags: Festauflührung im Prinz-Regenten-Theater.
Hector Berlioz: „Die Trojaner“ (I. Teil 4—6 Uhr, II. Teil 1/2 8—11 Uhr).
by the Münchner Hofkapelle on 4 June 1908 – although, in a realistic response to Hess’s plea, only Part Two was heard complete (even so, with some cuts in the second and fifth movements), preceded by just the second movement of Part One (the first baritone solo). As can be seen from the copies of two of the pages advertising the programme for the whole Festival that appeared in the periodical *Die Musik*¹⁹, the Mass was included in a huge concert – which was preceded in the afternoon by a meeting of the Festival’s “Hauptversammlung” (shareholders).

One of *Die Musik’s* critics, Dr Eduard Wahl, was pretty upset by the whole idea of the work, and was not overwhelmed by the performance either, but the music itself pleased him a little more:

> The second Orchestral Concert with our Court Orchestra under Felix Mottl’s wonderful direction consisted of an excerpt from Frederick Delius. “A Mass of Life” (Part 2) for soloists, chorus (the Choral Society) and orchestra was directed by chamber music singer Ludwig Hess. The “Mass of Life” is a setting of text from Nietzsche’s “Zarathustra” (selected by Paul [sic] Cassirer); actually an unhappy idea. Nietzsche’s words contain, on the one hand, so much music of their own that setting them to music appears superfluous, indeed even disturbing. And secondly, they reveal – and conceal – so much profoundly deep thought, that to [underpin them with music] is really a monstrous profanity. Nietzsche’s very well-known standpoint on contemporary music would certainly have turned him away in disgust from Delius’s conception of his work. If, however, out of a sense of goodwill, one disregards all that, one can state that Delius has much to say that extends beyond the usual, the obvious, the mundane. He purposely avoids a rigid framework, his sounds are only to paint moods and create atmosphere (a certain relationship with the French School, not least with Debussy, is noticeable here), and he succeeds in this, supported by clever, indeed very often perfect, instrumentation, even if perhaps his capability for variety of expression seems much restricted. Next to complete misconceptions like the baritone solo “Erhebt eure Herzen” – for the unsatisfactory effect of which, the baritone Rudolf Gmür was not entirely without blame – the combined efforts of the Choir, Orchestra and Soloists (the ladies Mientje van Lammen, Olga von Welden; and the gentlemen Benno Haberl and Rudolf Gmür) earned much praise. There were passages of the most noble kind as in the Part [2/III]: “Die Sonne ist lange schon hinunter” or in the “Mittagsphantasie” [Part 2/IV] in which the deep woodwind exceptionally happily express the silent quivering of the warm air. Tasteless and deafening is the noise that is made with the bells at the conclusion.²⁰

Delius’s great friend Granville Bantock – they knew each other so well that, extremely unusually, he could start a letter to Delius in 1908 “My dear Lad”! – had very much hoped to go over to Munich, but was unable to do so on
account of a last-minute obligation to the Lord Mayor of Birmingham (in his capacity of Professor of Music at Birmingham University) to conduct 15,000 children and 14 bands in Victoria Square. After the performance Delius wrote to him:

My “Mass” made an enormous impression – In fact much more than I ever expected – the Chorus was superb & the Tanzlied went splendidly……..It is going to be performed in several towns in Germany next season…. and Balfour Gardiner (to whom Delius had sent an inscribed copy of the newly published vocal score at the beginning of the year):

First, hearty congratulations on the success of your Messe des Lebens. I hope that you yourself were pleased with it, & have returned full of desire to work.

The first English performance was naturally to be given by Beecham, but he absolutely refused to use Bernhoff’s translation:

Fully convinced of this gentleman’s fitness for the task, [Harmonie] were now endeavouring to foist it on me. This I naturally opposed, and engaged the best man I knew in London to provide me with something that could be both sung and understood. This was William Wallace, one of the most versatile figures of the day…. 21

Beecham approached Wallace, who, in reply to one of Beecham’s letters said:

German or semi-German composers…..are not the best judges of what a good text is, and though Bernhoff may have letters from many thanking him for his work, they fail to see that the English will be criticized by Englishmen and not by Germans. Take the first line of Bernhoff. This will be sung “O thou my wi - ill”. Page 8: the word “cleped” is obsolete, and probably not one in 100 of your audience will know what it means. Page 14: who will understand what is meant by “prepared to mine ego”, etc? Page 56: last line of text “Wilt thou my hound” etc., is not grammar. “That is a dance” is foolish; now for a dance is English. “Pitless Columbine”!!! Page 113: “Rages” has two syllables, not one. Page 131: “ululating, inebriating” is simply putting a weapon in the hands of your critics. Page 180 what singer will have the assurance to get up and declare “I’m a temulent dulcet lyre (liar)”? On Page 184 it is the turn of the poetess to be “temulent”! Page 202: that word “awfuller” gives the text away. You cannot afford to have your critical taste in English shown up with this sort of thing. Every musician who has seen B’s text has said that it will damn the work if it is printed in the programme. I understand that “Harmonic” says, “We have no objection to a performance with the new text, on the supposition that it will be sent to us for disposal with all rights”. I made the new text for the sake of yourself and Beecham, and I will not allow it to be used for any other performance. If
“Harmonic” thinks that it is to their advantage to cancel Bernhoffs, they will have to pay for their mistakes like other people.”

Delius certainly liked the new words: “Wallace’s new translation is ripping and reads like an English poem.” The translation was not, however, the only problem. Although the situation may not have been so dire in Germany, it is now generally forgotten that, until about 50 or 60 years ago, the very large proportion of those who sang in English choral societies and choirs were, to a greater or lesser extent, unable to read music, and that instead they used the Tonic Sol-fa system for learning their notes.

Even the marvellous North Staffordshire District Choral Society from Hanley, who were to sing in the performance, needed it, for Delius wrote to Harmonie:

I have received the two copies of the 2nd part of the Mass and thank you very much for them. I have just heard from England that my Mass cannot be rehearsed there without choral parts in the English ‘Tonic Sol-fa’ as is customary in England. You will remember that you also had this done for Sea Drift and I beg you to apply to the same person at once and have it effected immediately, as the performance planned for London will be impossible otherwise. So it is of the greatest importance that it should be done at once. I have already had a telegram about it…..

and in a letter to Delius on 28 January 1909, Beecham told him:

I have made enquiries about the Tonic-sol-fa for the Mass; I think that it could have been done cheaper by Novellos. McNaught for instance does the translation himself – But as Breitkopf has the agency for the work, I do not think the other firm would undertake it. Outside of them, Curwens are the only other people in London, and I think as the work is difficult, it would not be advisable to hunt for a cheap man in the Provinces — If I cannot find anyone
else in the next few days, you had better put [it] in the hands of Curwen without
delay — Time is pressing and the Choir ought to have it soon — I will write you
again first thing next week — Love from us both

It must have been a complete nightmare for James Whewall, the Choral
Society’s conductor, teaching the Mass to even 150 out of its 250 or so\textsuperscript{26}
members using Tonic-Sol-fa.

The concert was on 7 June 1909, in Queen’s Hall, with the Beecham Orchestra
(as it was called then), the North Staffordshire Choral Society, Cicely
Gleeson-White, MG Grainger-Kerr (who always seems to have concealed her christian names) and Webster
Miller. Who it was who sang Zarathustra, though, is something of a mystery — and that is
considered below.

The review in The Times (then, of course, a broadsheet) the following day took up
an entire column, and (although considerably increasing the length of this article) it is well
worth reproducing here:

Mr. Frederick Delius’s setting for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra of words
chosen from Nietzsche’s Also sprach Zarathustra raises again the difficult
question as to what is suitable literary material for musical treatment. Mr. Fritz
Cassirer, to whom the work is dedicated, has put together a libretto on the same
principle as that adopted by the compilers of Biblical oratorios. He has chosen a
number of passages from various parts of the text and placed them together to
illustrate certain aspects of Zarathustra’s philosophy as seen through Nietzsche,
in episodes which are partly dramatic and partly reflective. On the dramatic side
we have the person of Zarathustra more or less closely identified with a baritone
 solo voice, and the chorus used dramatically to represent the “higher-born
mortals” and the group of dancing girls in the forest. Elsewhere the words are treated impersonally and the voices are used according to principles of musical contrast alone. A double chorus forms the first movement, and takes the place of the devotional chorus of oratorio. Its text is:

Thou, Will unflinching, Thou vanquisher of need,
Thou, my essential Life,
Safeguard me from all petty earthly conquests!

We quote here and elsewhere from Mr. William Wallace’s rigorous English translation, which was used to some extent in the performance instead of the one printed in the vocal score. After this, the baritone solo, introduces the first message of the philosopher with the words: “Uplift ye your hearts, uplift them, brothers, high…..all laughter proclaim I holy; ye higher-born mortals, learn ye laughter.” In the third movement the colloquy between Zarathustra and Life is carried on by all the solo voices in a purely abstract fashion; but the rhythmic dance music assigned to the chorus has a realistic purpose, since it gives the picture of a vast crowd, reveling in the joy of life, whom Zarathustra himself (baritone solo) addresses at the climax of the movement with the words “O ye, my new companions, ye strange and wondrous men.” The two numbers which complete the first part are soliloquies upon the riddle of existence, in which the chorus is only used to give additional colour and to enforce the words of the baritone solo. Another double chorus of the abstract kind: “Arise, now arise, thou glorious noonday” opens the second part, and a series of contrasted scenes follow, from each of which the teacher draws his lesson, until the work ends with the message “The world is deep, and deeper far than any day can tell; Deep is its woe; Sorrow is scarce so deep as joy. Woe saith ‘Begone!’ , but joy aspires to endless day, to measureless, eternal day.”

The words contain passages of great descriptive beauty, which give splendid opportunities to a musician with that power of using colour which Mr. Delius possesses so conspicuously. Such words as these: “Night reigneth; now louder murmur the leaping crystalline fountains, and like them my soul is a fountain leaping upwards.” from the nocturne which ends the first part, and others in the “Invocation to his Lyre” and the “Noontide” movements seem made for lyrical expression. In spite of them, however, the philosophic thesis remains the main purpose of the work, and neither the descriptive imagery, the dramatic moments, nor the purely lyrical ones are sufficiently constant to make a scheme which demands music from first to last. There is necessarily a great portion of the work where the philosophy is less poetically clothed, and where consequently the vocal music becomes mere declamation and the elaborate orchestral texture seems inappropriate. Such passages give the work a certain ponderousness, which could only be
avoided by concentrating the didactic second part into a smaller space.

The general characteristics of Mr. Delius’s music are now fairly familiar
from “Appalachia” and “Sea-drift,” [sic, Ed.] as well as works for orchestra
alone. Most of them appear again in the Mass of Life, from the masterly
orchestration to the arresting and angular harmonic progressions. But the
largeness of the scheme requires a larger musical plan than any of the
former works, and its subject calls for a depth of thought, the lack of which
could not be made up by any amount of technical facility and orchestral
effectiveness. Mr. Delius has responded to these demands in a remarkable
way, and the sincerity of expression is the first quality which is felt. We
have shown that the work is divided into clearly defined movements, and
the unity of design in each one is kept by the use of a few representative
themes. The most conspicuous of these is the simple “bell” theme of four
notes, which appears early and gradually becomes more insistent till it
dominates the whole of the last scene. The only sign of weakness is in the
composer’s choral writing. In the big first chorus he gives the singers very
few phrases which are interesting to sing in themselves. He seems bent on
making the words felt by hurling (as it were) great blocks of harmony at the
hearers; and though the chorus which opens the second part is more
distinctive, its phrases are more instrumental than vocal and the most
characteristic theme sounds much more effective on the trombones than it
does when shouted out by the basses. The dancing chorus (women’s voices,
sung without words) is disappointing, and gives the impression that the
composer had not calculated the effect accurately. The orchestration is
often too heavy for the voices, the rhythm becomes monotonous.

But against these and other crude places, some of which are hard to bear,
must be set passages of such conspicuous beauty as the beginning of the “Song
of Life”, where the altos of the chorus sing a lovely refrain to the tenor solo, the
melody set to the words “O Man, mark well,” which recurs in the finale, and the
theme on the horns in the nocturne. The orchestral introduction to the second
part suggesting the hour before dawn, the undulating quavers which accompany
the “Invitation to his Lyre”, the ending “Now the aged midday sleeps” (Part Two,
No.4), and the whole building up of the finale upon the “bell” theme are things
which could not fail to make their right impression.

The performance, in which Mr. Thomas Beecham conducted his own
orchestra and the North Staffordshire District Choral Society, was a careful
and in many respects a good one. The ensemble, however, is so difficult and
the composer treats his voices so ruthlessly, writing passages for the sopranos
which lie round G and A and not infrequently go up to C, that it was scarcely
wonderful that some queer screams were heard, and the intonation was not
very perfect. With more refined playing, too, it is probable that the orchestration
would not overweight the voices to the same extent as it did at this first performance. Still, since it was a first performance, great perfection of detail was scarcely to be expected. Among the solo singers the chief honours fell to Mr. Charles Clark, who interpreted the principal part with strong character and intimate feeling. Considering the width of range, both in actual compass and in expression, his voice was wonderfully ready for all demands, but it was not surprising that in some places it sounded rather tired. Miss Gleeson-White, Miss Grainger-Kerr, Mr. Webster Millar, and Mr. Stanley Adams all worked very hard, and were as effective a quartet as could be wished for. There was a fairly large and appreciative audience, and Mr. Delius was called to the platform and heartily applauded.

That is an amazing piece of writing to have produced between the end of the concert and when the presses started to roll! Although, of course, the critics of the other papers came away with many different impressions of the work, by and large they were all favourable.

Returning to the question of the baritone(s), the catalogue of Beecham’s performances states that Stanley Adams sang the part, and does not mention Charles Clark; Lyndon Jenkins does not mention Adams, nor does Beecham (in Frederick Delius); however, The Times, the Musical Times and The Standard all referred to them both – so there were almost certainly two baritones. Robert Threlfall believes that that could well have been the case. Right up until the very last 67 bars of the whole work, Zarathustra’s part is marked “Bariton solo”, and (as Paul Guinery explains below), the first (and only) time all four soloists sing together as a quartet, is at cue 132, the final ‘Ode to Joy and Eternity’; there, their parts are simply marked “Sopran.”, “Alto”, “Tenor” and “Bariton”.

It is known that Delius, whether or not surprisingly, owned a copy of Bach’s St Matthew Passion – in which, of course, the Evangelist is sung by one tenor, and, in order not to tax his voice too much, his arias are almost invariably sung by another; that is also the case with the baritone part of Jesus; likewise, in a full symphony orchestra, to save his ‘lip’, the first horn has what is known as a “bumper” sitting beside him, who plays the first horn part in quite a lot of the ‘loud bits’, when there is no solo work. (At moments of great excitement, of course - particularly in Mahler, Strauss and Elgar - neither of them can resist playing, so they will both do so!). Ergo, it is just possible that Delius decided to employ the same sort of idea at cue 132 – but if I had been Charles Clark I would most certainly not have stopped singing at that point, and Stanley Adams would have had me in unstoppable flood beside him! In the event, neither Adams nor Clark ever seem to have sung for Beecham again.

Hot on the heels of that performance came another one in Germany –
on 11 December 1909 in the Stadthalle at Elberfeld, the faithful Hans Haym conducted the Elberfelder Gesangverein, with Emma Tester, Meta Distel, Matthäus Römer and Charles Clark as the soloists. This time, it was reported more widely. The General Anzeiger für Elberfeld-Barmen for 14 December said:

That was a thought-provoking Saturday evening, which was indeed a Red Letter Day in the annals of the Elberfeld Concert Society and particularly for their conductor, Dr. Hans Haym, who deserved much honour. The performance of this “Mass”, this paean, this praising of Life, must be regarded as the first complete German performance, because at the Music Festival in Munich two years ago only excerpts were performed. It really is a work of art and without doubt one of the chief events of the season. Frederick Delius is a man with an individual feeling; a striver and an achiever, who has something new and personal to say, whose hand reaches out to the highest. If one is allowed to give an opinion of this work, Delius has, with this composition discovered new territory. That his “Mass” represents one of the most important works of the last twenty years, is unquestionable. With its contrasting and changing effects, its constantly advancing, developing progression, no monotony can set in, which might have been feared; the individual musical impressionistic pictures are quite various, despite the inner spiritual combinations in the whole concept, with rich variety of changes from choir and soloists, in all possible combinations and in the differentiation of moods. This Tone-Poet has used all the colours of his palette to illustrate the mood of the text in his own musical language. The instrumentation moves from noble simplicity to the highest refinement. With him, colouristic and impressionistic effects are used only as a means to an end; he does not apply them for their own sake, but he does so with such artistic sensitivity that his unprejudiced ear creates a magic in which encompasses all his music. On the other hand, it appeared to us that, for all its dark depths and sparkling heights of poetic output, in an effort to avoid well-worn paths, inspiration was somewhat lacking in the soloists’ parts. However, it might be that on hearing the work more often, this impression would disappear. If we wish to highlight individual brilliant items, for example in Part One, the opening double chorus has a grand effect; similarly, the double chorus in No. 3 is a masterpiece – and the choir performed it outstandingly. No. 5 is a wonderful, deep, impressionist picture – a description of the night and its secret, loud sounds. Quite unusually beautiful, too, and with its mood wonderfully captured, is the Great Midday of No. 1 in Part Two, with a glorious orchestral introduction. No. 2, with its strange-sounding close, is a true miracle, and the ladies of the Society had mastered its difficulties extremely well. Immediately following that comes a description of the meadows at the slumbrous Midday in No. 3, which is among the most beautiful parts of the whole work. Very touching, too, is the deeply sensitive, introvertive, baritone solo in No. 5 “O Mensch, gib acht!” (“Oh
Man, be careful!"), with its accompanying male voices. The performance was absolutely outstanding. Conductor, orchestra and choir have covered themselves equally with glory. Everything was there: peace, a sure touch, power, beauty. One was aware that everything was well-prepared and rehearsed. The soloists also cut good figures. The main soloist (baritone), was Charles W. Clark of Paris, whose sonorous and, well-trained voice left the best impression, even though sometimes the volume could have been greater to match the orchestra. In the deep-grounded and dionysian humour of No. 2 in Part One, he stood fairly helplessly, but carried himself well in the rest of the work. Of the tenor solo, Dr. Matthäus Römer, one could wish more security of tone in his voice production. The well-known Stuttgart alto, Meta Diestell, produced her artistically-schooled, rounded, soft voice quite excellently, and also showed her valuable qualities of expression and clear enunciation. The bright, silvery voice of the soprano, Emma Tetzer, always carried well and powerfully over the orchestra. The composer, who appeared at the finish to the accompaniment of lively applause, will probably be just as contented with the performance as we were. The significant success of the work is well-earned by him and all concerned in its production.

while the distinguished *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* for 23 December was equally enthusiastic:

After the performance of the Second Part of this work at the Music Festival in Munich in 1908, which, despite an unsatisfactory presentation, stimulated wide interest in professional circles, there followed now in Elberfeld, organised by the Concert Society (Conductor Dr. Haym) the first performance of the complete Mass anywhere in Germany. (The very first performance took place in London). The composer, born in 1863 [sic] in England to German parents, was presented with a completely new problem: he wanted to sing a song of high praise – a sacred song, a hymn - to earthly life. This idea had its roots and took its concrete shape through Delius’s absorption in Nietzsche’s “Zarathustra”. From this poem, which indeed already glows through and through with music, Fritz Cassirer’s sensitive hand chose the most beautiful songs and texts, without himself actually placing them in a logical sequence, (e.g. through recitative). Like the example of Bach in the Magnificat, Zarathustra speaks sometimes through one or more soloists, at other times through the choir to the listeners. The continuous ‘red guide-line’ through the work and through all sections is this firmly-held basic precept: glorification of earthly life with all its highs and lows. The danger of monotony was avoided by the composer by means of contrasts and intensification. Delius has not solved the new problem as a modern programme-musician; he is no eclectic composer. We see Delius wandering along paths that have been little trodden by others. By studying the highly interesting full score one searches in vain for actual ‘Leitmotivs’ (continuously occurring themes), contrapuntal handling of voices, homogenous section
grouping, flexible theme-building and firm contours. Everything is seen as an idiosyncratic sound production, as the result of individual colour-mixing. Under the perfectly-developed artistic hand of the colourist there blooms the mystical mood-content of Nietzsche’s poem to captivating sound-pictures, amongst which the descriptions of Nature appear as the most successful; perhaps explained by the fact that the composer had time to develop an intimate acquaintance with woodlands, fields and meadows during his period running a farm in Florida.

First class mood-pictures are: “Heisser Mittag schlaf auf den Fluren” (“Hot midday sleeps on the meadows”); the dance-song, a baritone solo with accompanying women’s chorus (Dance and laughter is the symbol of human freedom); the Midday Hour. Although Delius achieves more prominence in the invention of harmony than in that of melody, even so he shows himself often as an elegant, melodic creative power, for example in the Midnight Song for baritone and bass choir voices. There, where Zarathustra’s dying thoughts are softly expressed, the music is coloured by an individual, elegiac feeling. In the powerful closing dancing sequences the ear is aware of strong accents, celebratory greatness in the “Drunken Song” that in mysterious words speaks of the eternal return of all earthly things; the double chorus at the beginning of the First Part has a thrilling power and noble swing to it (“O du mein Wille, du Wende aller Not”) and in the Second Part (“Herauf nun, du grosser Mittag”).

The performance itself presents the greatest difficulty for all the participants. Only very musical, note-confident singers and a highly-trained orchestra may risk approaching this giant work under the secure direction of an experienced conductor. The success will then not be lacking: Delius is a musical genius, through and through, who, in the “Mass of Life” has given us his own values and will, in any case, still have many new things to say to us. The highest demands were met in this performance (soloist quartet: Frau Pester [sic], FrL. Diestel, both from Stuttgart, Herr Dr. Römer from Nuremberg and Herr Clark from Paris).

The composer, who was present, responding to the enthusiastic applause (namely after the Second Part) and who was given a crown of laurels, declared in a short speech to the orchestra that the performance was the most characterful and moving that he had experienced.

and Die Musik even more so:

The third subscription concert of the Elberfeld Concert Society gave us the opportunity to become acquainted with a work that one can regard as one of the most important additions to the contemporary musical scene: “A Mass of Life” by Frederick Delius. It was the first complete performance in Germany. In contrast to the Dead Mass, the Requiem, the composer called his work “A Mass of Life”, with text selected by F. Cassirer from Nietzsche’s “Thus Spake
Zarathustra”. One can say what one wishes about the choice of text, but one must admit that the Zarathustra poem has a great swing to it, and the chosen extracts set by the composer offer an excellent basis for a series of musical mood pictures. And that Delius is a master of mood-painting, he has already shown in his symphonic poems “Paris” and “Appalachia”; also in his opera “Coanga” [sic], which has already been performed in this theatre. They are quite unique colours that he takes for this purpose from his orchestral palette; quite wonderful sounds that are available to him for the reproduction of Nature voices. With a ‘modern’ composer like Delius, certain complicated harmonic structures, disharmonies, yes, quite strange sounds occur, but they are in part occasioned by the text. Included in the most magnificent numbers and happiest melodic inspirations of the composer, we can cite the grand Night Chorus in the First Part, the Evening and Midday scenes in the Second Part and the splendid Celebration ending with the Midnight Bell Song.

Dr. Haym has done truly pioneering work on behalf of Delius and brought admirable enthusiasm to his newest creation. He not only took trouble to explain in spoken and written word to bring an understanding of Delius’s music, but also expended great energy in the preparation for performance of the difficult work, so that in all sections the performance was highly successful. Contributing to the success, in addition to the Choir and the considerably augmented State Orchestra, the soloists too, played a prominent part – above all Emma Tester, Soprano, (Stuttgart), and Meta Diestel, Alto, (Stuttgart), but also Charles W. Clark, Baritone, (Paris), and Dr. Matthäus Römer - Tenor, (Nürnberg).

Ferdinand Schemensky

One tends to think that few, if any, of Delius’s works were enthusiastically received at their early performances – but that was certainly not the case in Germany with the Mass. Indeed, bearing in mind the difficulty of the music for the huge forces needed and the cost, it subsequently received an amazing number of further ones there. It was done twice in Vienna on 18 and 19 February 1911 (for the Workers’ Symphony Concerts!); Haym gave his second, and, it seems, wonderful, performance (which Delius attended) as part of a Centenary Festival in Elberfeld between 20 and 22 October 1911 to celebrate anniversaries of the Elberfeld Choral and Concert Societies (see the copy programme cover); Munich again on 20 January 1913; in Wiesbaden and Frankfurt in 1914; in Coblenz on 18 December 1925; and in the same year in Wiesbaden again and in Berlin, as well as in Prague. After the Vienna concerts, both Bartok and Kodály wrote very enthusiastically to Delius – and Bartok was so struck by the two Tanzlieds that he subsequently wrote an essay about Delius’s use of a wordless chorus.31 Interestingly, in the autumn of 1911 Delius (perhaps a
little over-optimistically) ordered 1000 copies of the choir parts – vocal scores were not used, on account of their bulk and weight – but was upset when he learned how much Harmonie wanted to charge for them.32

A performance that Beecham had planned for 1911 had to be cancelled, apparently because he was unable to get the right soloists, and it was postponed until 10 March 1913; because of the unavailability of Queen’s Hall, it took place at Covent Garden. Even then, however, there were problems with the soloists, and because the baritone, Charles Clark, who was brought in at the last moment, could not sing in German, he and the chorus used the English text and the other three soloists the German one.33 (It is interesting that his linguistic limitations had not apparently prevented him singing in the 1909 Elberfeld performance – there is certainly no mention in any of the reports that ‘mixed languages’ were used.). Furthermore, the chorus - again the Hanley choir – was not thought to have sung as well as it did in 1909. Neither Beecham nor Delius can therefore have been very pleased with the outcome.

At the risk of making this article too long, there was a later, apparently marvellous, performance that should be mentioned - at a Royal Philharmonic Society on 2 April 1925, with Miriam Licette, Astra Desmond, Walter Widdop and Roy Henderson, The Queen’s Hall Orchestra and The Philharmonic Choir,34 conducted by the Danish conductor and composer Paul von Klenau (1883-1946 – a great champion of Delius’s music). This was Roy Henderson’s celebrated first Mass, when he was called in at the very last moment:

The combination of Nietzsche and Delius was too much for a number of worthy souls, who fled from the Philharmonic Concert on Thursday, after this section or that, with an air of being anxious to go while the going was good.
Those of us who remained to the end had one of the richest experiences of our lives. We may say what we like about Delius’s artistic faults and his technical weaknesses – his monotony of mood, his mannerisms of harmony, his sometimes haphazard writing; the fact remains that here is some of the very finest music of the last twenty-five years, music that often leaves us drunk with beauty. Mr. Paul Klenau is evidently a Delius enthusiast. He conducted the work with the most sensitive feeling for its peculiar quality, and drew some fine playing from the orchestra and some good singing from The Philharmonic Choir. Of the soloists, Mr. Roy Henderson, a young man whose name I had not heard before, was head and shoulders, figuratively speaking, above his fellows. His voice is a baritone of good quality and range, the high G coming quite easily to him. His diction is first-rate, and that he is a born musician was shown not only by his exquisite phrasing but by his having committed the whole of the difficult baritone part to memory. No oddity in the harmonies or the colours around him could confuse for a moment either his ear or his larynx. He sang the music precisely as it should be sung, with philosophic fervour but without false dramatisation. His colleagues were all too much the slaves of their books to get anything like his freedom into their singing, though Miss Licette did some very beautiful things. Mr. Widdop sounded strained, and as regards interpretation took too operatic a view of the music. Miss Astra Desmond took too oratorioish and British cantataish a view of hers…….her singing [of the supremely beautiful section “ O Zarathustra”] was quite spoiled for some of us by the emotional over-emphasis she put into every phrase. Her singing here might have brought the house down in “He shall feed His flock”…………but it was not in the key of Nietzsche, and still less in the key of Delius, who has expressly marked the movement 

*quieto, molto tranquillo*,\(^{35}\)

………… the performance will be remembered, for, if I read the signs aright, it marked a considerable step forward towards recognition of the great worth of this rare and choice music….\(^{36}\)

Miss Astra Desmond (contralto) was capable, self-possessed, and comparatively untroubled by the imaginative faculty which all the others showed in their interpretation.\(^{37}\)

Here, if anywhere is a philosophy not so much set to music as transformed and transfigured into music. But for its presentation the work wants performers who are at once musicians and philosophers. The other evening, we had the right man in charge…..\(^{38}\)
On Thursday, an event!... The Royal Philharmonic Society (to whom, almost alone, we this season look for programmes of new or rarely heard music) is on Thursday... to perform the Delius “Mass of Life”... “A Mass of Life”, from its first triumphal choral invocation of the will of man to the stupendous closing hymn to Eternity wherein the heart would break for very excess of joy, is an epic of initiation, of the bringing to birth of God in Man.39

Above all, [Paul von Klenau], is clearly an exceptional choral conductor, for the Philharmonic Choir has never sung so well.... All [the soloists] were good, but undoubtedly the best was Mr Henderson, who took the part of Zarathustra. He sang not only musically, but with rare artistic intelligence. He has a fine voice and uses it well.... He should go far.... There was a very large audience.40

Many, if not all, of the critics found the text difficult, to say the least, and Dynley Hussey in The Saturday Review41 took a particularly blunt view:

But a far more patent obstacle to the appreciation of the ‘Mass’ is its text. Apart from the slump in Supermen and all the other paraphernalia of the Nietzschean philosophy, it is difficult to get past the jargon of these excerpts from ‘Also sprach Zarathustra’, which are almost wholly unintelligible by themselves, away from the poem as a whole. How can a plain, blunt Englishman not laugh at the idea of his toes listening, and see beyond the verbal nonsense into the mystical sense which lies behind?

Although Delius’s music had been performed relatively widely in America since 1909 (when Max Fiedler and the Boston Symphony Orchestra did, believe it or not, Appalachia, Brigg Fair, In a Summer Garden and Paris), it was not until 12 January 1938 that the Mass had its first hearing there (and only then the major parts of it, as Hugh Ross and his Schola Cantorum gave it in a cut version), and the first performance of the whole work was conducted by Eugene Goossens in Cincinatti, eight years later, on 8 May 1946.42

Jelka had reported to Ida Gerhardi, in a letter after Beecham’s 1913 performance, that:

Fred said that, apart from the singers, in this performance the orchestra was for the first time just as he had conceived it, & Munich & Elberfeld so bad that he had had doubts about the quality of the music.43

Nevertheless, it must actually have been a cause of great satisfaction to Delius that in the 16 years following the first performance, the work had been done more than a dozen times.
1 Letter: 24 October 1898.
2 Ida Gerhardi (1862-1927), a German painter who was one of the Delius family's closest friends.
4 16 February 1900.
5 Jelka Delius: ibid.
6 Letter: 18 November 1900.
7 Jelka Delius: ibid.
8 Letter to FD 20 December 1902; ‘Stimmingsvoll’ = ‘atmospheric’.
9 Letter: 19 June 1903.
10 Letter: 1 September 1903.
13 Letter: 5 June 1907.
14 Letter: Harmonie to FD, 6 May 1907.
15 Music & Copyright: The Case of Delius and his Publishers (Ashgate, 2007).
16 Letter to FD 9 October 1907.
17 Letter to FD 31 October 1907.
18 Letter: 16 April 1908.
19 (1877-1944). He had originally been an opera singer, but succeeded the distinguished Wagner conductor Felix Mottl (1856-1911) as the conductor at Munich in 1907.
20 Die Musik VII, Heft 7, 3. Quartal 1907-1908, Band 27.
22 Sir Thomas Beecham: Frederick Delius (Hutchinson, 1959) p.161.
24 Of which the Editor’s mother was a member, and sang in this performance.
26 It was introduced into England by Sarah Ann Glover (1785-1867) and improved by The Reverend John Curwen (1816-1880). Its basis is that the keynote is called ‘Do’ and subsequent notes in the scale based on that keynote are known as ‘re’, ‘me’, ‘fa’, ‘so’, ‘la’, ‘te’ and ‘do’. The system was considerably improved by the Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly who invented a set of hand signals which enabled the conductor or chorus master to indicate the required notes with the series of hand signs (See the illustration above).
28 A History of The North Staffordshire District Choral Society (published privately) shows that in October 1909 it had 266 Members.
29 While Spring & Summer Sang (Ashgate 2005) p.11.
30 18 June 1909.
31 Delius had originally thought that Frederic Austin would be the ideal Zarathustra. When he was in London in April 1907, he wrote to Jelka saying “There is a
splendid Baritone here, a Mr. Austin, very musical & I hope that he will sing Sea-drift at Sheffield and later the “Messe”. In the event, he did Sea Drift, at Sheffield on 7 October 1908 – “Austin sang wonderfully” Delius told her afterwards – and then three times with Beecham at the end of the year and early in 1909. He never did the Mass with Beecham.

30 Vol. 34, 1909 - 1910, Section 9.
31 For details, see Delius: A Life in Letters Vol II, p. 69.
32 Letter: 11 November 1911 (in Music & Copyright, supra.).
33 Lyndon Jenkins, ibid, p. 19.
34 The Editor’s mother was a member of the Choir, and sang in this performance.
35 Sunday Times, 5 April 1925.
36 The Telegraph, 3 April 1925.
37 The Times, 3 April 1925.
39 Percy Scholes in The Observer, 29 March 1925.
40 The Star, 3 April 1925.
41 11 April 1925.
43 Lyndon Jenkins, ibid. p. 19.

[NB: Unless otherwise stated in those endnotes, the letters from which I have quoted can all be found in Delius: a Life in Letters and Music & Copyright – and my grateful thanks are due to Lionel Carley, Robert Montgomery and Robert Threlfall, for allowing me to do so from their respective books; also to Robert Threlfall for having checked my draft and some suggestions for improving it; and to Norman Jones and Rüdiger Wöbbeking for finding and translating the German criticisms.]
A MASS OF LIFE

A MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Paul Guinery

[References below to “figures” (fig.) are to the rehearsal numbers in the current Boosey & Hawkes edition of the full score, prepared for publication by Robert Threlfall as volume 10 of the Collected Works. This edition was completely re-originated from various sources including the first publication of the full score as issued in two volumes by Harmonie Verlag of Berlin in 1907. As in my previous articles, I use a form of shorthand for musical references: (fig.17+7), for example, means the seventh bar after figure 17, counting 17 itself as bar 1. Timings in brackets refer to the 1997 Chandos recording conducted by Richard Hickox (CHAN 9515-2) which for all intents and purposes has a suitably clear sound quality.]

A Mass of Life is divided into two unequal parts, of five and six numbered movements respectively, Part Two being roughly twice the duration of Part One. An unnumbered, purely orchestral introduction (On The Mountains) precedes the first movement of Part Two.

The scoring calls for substantial forces: soprano, contralto, tenor and baritone soloists; mixed double-chorus; 3 flutes (1st doubling piccolo); 3 oboes; bass oboe; cor anglais; 3 clarinets; bass clarinet; 3 bassoons; double bassoon; 6 horns; 4 trumpets; 3 tenor trombones; bass tuba; timpani; bass and side drums; percussion (cymbals, triangle, castanets, glockenspiel, tam-tam, tubular bells); 2 harps; and no less than 68 strings (including 12 double basses!).

The indication in the original 1907 score “Basshoboe (sic.) auch Englisch Horn” would imply that the bass oboe and the cor anglais can be doubled by the same player: in fact they can’t, as there are several occasions where they play simultaneously i.e. in the second and fourth movements of Part Two.

Throughout the work Delius treats the soloists and double chorus as completely independent from the orchestra in the sense that their musical lines are virtually never doubled by other instruments. Indeed, he appears to think of the voices as separate ‘instruments’ in their own right. The vocal writing in places can seem awkward to articulate and to pitch and below I give just one instance (though there are many) of how Delius places huge demands on vocal technique, particularly for choral singers. But these characteristically angular vocal lines, dictated by Delius’s acute harmonic sense, are very much a
feature of his vocal writing and there are many similar examples in the operas and in the big choral works.

When it comes to setting words, Delius often follows a precedent he set in Sea Drift (see DSJ 139) and ‘overlaps’ text between different voices singing at the same time. Good examples of this are at figure 28 where three of the soloists sing three different texts simultaneously; and at figure 39 where for some dozen bars or so the contralto soloist offers a completely different message from that of the choral basses. But this is obviously the effect Delius wanted.

It’s perhaps surprising that there are relatively few cross-references to thematic material between the separate movements. I detail some recurring themes below, the ‘Midnight Song’, the ‘Bell Theme’ and ‘Zarathustra’s Theme’ being the most notable. It means that there is relatively little unifying material in this vast score to bind it together and therefore individual movements often stand alone, thematically. Had Richard Strauss written this score there would no doubt be hundreds of separate leitmotiven representing the abstract concepts of Nietzsche’s text. But that is not Delius’s way.

PART ONE

I. This is a purely choral and orchestral movement with two main sections:

A: *Con fervore* (*animato*). The music begins abruptly as if in *media res*, indicative of some introductory pages which were subsequently eliminated (see Threlfall: Editorial Report: Delius Trust 1990, p.74). The opening bars have a great onward sweep, relentlessly driven by a powerful motor of repeated triplets in the woodwind and upper strings (it puts one in mind of Schubert’s *Erlköning* - not that Delius would have welcomed the analogy). The implied key is F major but the harmonic centre is immediately ambiguous as the sopranos and tenors flatten the 7th of the scale to an E flat and the music veers off into a rapid sequence of A flat / F minor / D minor etc. F is not conclusively re-established until 27 bars later (fig.1+13) (0’55”). The vocal writing is strenuous (sopranos going up to top B flats, later even to a top C natural). One of Delius’s favourite rhythmic motifs is heard in woodwind, trumpets etc. (ex.1) (fig.1+15) (1’00”), the ‘monogram’ with which he signs so many of his works. A bridge passage (*più tranquillo*) (fig.2+1) (1’11”) forms a second sub-section; a third (*maestoso con grandezza*) (ex.2) (fig.3) (1’39”) unveils a memorable D major theme in flutes, horns, harps and unison strings (though perversely, given the ‘singable’ quality of it, is not given to the voices); it is however memorably
repeated in the key of A flat by the brass (fig.4+5) (2’24). Two bars of trumpet fanfares (fig.6+1) (3’16”) then lead to:

A\textsuperscript{2}: This is a telescoped reprise of Section A (but about one-third shorter); initially (fig.6+3) (3’20”) it has an identical text and musical setting but it diverges (fig.7+13) (4’14”) to omit the più tranquillo sub-section and goes direct to the maestoso theme (fig.8+1) (4’31”), now soaring out in F major. The music broadens with a sostenuto marking (fig.9+6) (5’08”), the 1st sopranos
proclaiming “Siege!” (“Triumph!”) on a top C, and the music pulls itself up for the final bars in an exhilarating, all-guns-blazing coda.

II. Recitative: animoso con alcuna licenza. The most succinct movement of the entire Mass and a counterweight to the fourth movement of this Part. Here the vocal setting is for the baritone soloist alone, the first four bars being accompanied in classical ‘recitative’ style. But Delius soon goes his own way from the fifth bar onwards in his favoured 6/4 metre as the invitation to Laughter and Dance is extended. The movement is through-composed and there are no particular sub-divisions, though the Dance itself begins most obviously at fig.11+1 (0’28”) where there is some fine orchestral word-painting for “diese Krone des Lachenden” (“this crown of laughter”) in woodwind, horns, trumpets, harps and triangle. Other examples are at fig.12+3 (0’57”): “dem Winde tut mir gleich” (“the wind is akin to me”) with harp glissandi; fig.12+7 (1’05”): “nach seinen eignen Pfeife will er tanzen” (“he’ll dance to his own whistling”) evoked in trills for flute and clarinet; and fig.13+1 (1’15”): “unter seinen Fusstopfen” (“his feet stamping”) underlined firstly by the rhythms of the violins and then by triangle and castanets.

III. This movement, the most extended of Part One, introduces the remaining three soloists. It falls into five main sections:

A: Andante tranquillo con dolcezza. The most lyrical music we’ve heard so far is ushered in by a quietly pulsing, muted 1st horn above a bed of arching cello figurations and a pedal open-fifth on the tonic (B major) joined in the second bar by the altos of Choir 1 singing a vocalise to the syllable “Ah!”. The tenor soloist enters in the fifth bar followed by the soprano soloist (fig.16+1) (1’16”) as the key-centre moves up a notch to C; then the contralto soloist puts in an appearance with choral sopranos joining the altos (fig.17+1) (1’58”). The texture builds, permeated by the rhythm of a swaying quaver-crotchet-quaver rhythm.

B: Poco più mosso ma moderato. A new key-signature (F major) (fig.19+1) (2’57”) and time-signature (4/4) introduce this section, characterised by vocal solos, a duet (fig.20+9) (3’33”) and finally a trio (fig.21+9) (3’51”), accompanied throughout by the “La, la, la-ing” of the sopranos and altos of Choir 1. The orchestral texture gradually fills out as the solo voices become more impassioned, marked as piu animato and with a shift into 3/4 (fig.22+8) (4’17”), changing gear metrically in preparation for the next section.
C: *Con moto.* For this depiction of the Tanz über Stock und Stein ("dance over stick and stone"), we get a foretaste of the *Dance Rhapsodies* to come. We find Delius weaving a texture that looks suspiciously like counterpoint, a rare excursion for him into such territory. If hardly fugal, there are certainly plenty of imitative entries for the voices. Both choirs are involved, singing a mixture of text and vocalise; the soloists (though minus the baritone) are present, often singing three different texts at once (i.e. fig.28+1) (5’35”), a pertinent example of Delius’s ‘overlapping’ technique, as mentioned above. The orchestration ‘swings’ along with a dominance of arpeggio figuration in strings and wind and the whole section reaches a climax (fig.32 et seq.) (6’36”). In a typically Delian way it then deflates over the space of just a few bars (fig.33+6) (6’59”) as the tempo broadens (*slargando*) and the ubiquitous “la, la, la’s” are briefly repeated by distant altos.

D: *Andante tranquillo.* This is in the nature of a bridge passage, consisting of a brief solo for the baritone (fig.35+1) (7’31”) expressing his delight in what he’s just heard and thereby encouraging a fragmentary repeat of the melodic vocalise of fig.19, this time shared between the altos and tenors of Choir 1.

E: *Quieto, molto tranquillo - più lento.* This is the emotional heart of the movement: first we have an imposing statement by the contralto soloist (fig.38+1) (9’20”) in the unexpected key of E flat as she upbraids Zarathustra for his lack of faith to her (“du bist mir nicht treu genug!”), and prophecies that when Zarathustra wakes at midnight and hears “die alte Brummglocke” (”the ancient, booming bell”) he will remember her words. The bell itself tolls low down in the 2nd horn (fig.39+5) (10’50”) (*mezzopiano marcato*) and then with the addition of both harps (fig.39+10) (11’09”: it’s a little melodic fragment (ex.3) built on rising perfect-fifths that will assume much importance later. Whilst the contralto is still only half-way through intoning her warning, the basses of Choir 1 enter *sotto voce* and *pppp* with the important Mitternachtslied or “Midnight Song”. First drafted sometime in the 1890s for baritone and piano, this was “music of deep import, beyond anything he had done before” (Jelka Delius); that first version can be consulted in volume 18b of the Collected Works where it appears in the appendix as *Noch ein Mal*. Delius subsequently arranged it (1898) for baritone solo, male chorus and orchestra. It’s used twice in *A Mass of Life*: here at fig.39+1(10’35”) and then later in the 6th movement of Part Two (fig.127+1). There are some minor variants in this first appearance from the original version for voice and piano: the time-signature is 4/4 rather than 4/2; there are some alterations in notes (i.e. fig.39+1: final quaver is B natural rather than D sharp) and in rhythm (i.e. fig.40+7: a sequence of four
crotchets rather than two sets of dotted crotchet plus quaver). We should also note that here in Part One the orchestral accompaniment is utterly different from that of the reprise in Part Two where it’s more or less faithful to the original. The soprano soloist adds her observations (fig.40+9) (11’59”) in a coda of exquisite beauty scored for hushed strings with wisps of flute, oboe and horn.

IV. *Agitato ma moderato.* A counterpart to the second movement, this is another declamatory baritone solo, again with the feel of a recitative, only this time with additional commentary from both choirs. The mood is dark and desperate, matching Zarathustra’s troubled spirit, though a change of key to F major (fig.46+1) (1’52”) – “die Stunde naht” (“the hour draws near”) seems to clear the air and bridges the movement to the one that follows.

The ‘bell motif’ from the 3rd movement (ex.3) recurs in 3rd bassoon and 1st horn (fig.42+5) (0’32”) at the mention of the “Mitternachtsherz” (“Midnight Heart”) and later in 3rd trombone, tuba, cellos and double basses (fig.45+2) (1’27”); it’s heard again two bars later, in 3rd bassoon, double bassoon, 2nd and 4th horns, cellos and double basses; and it also reappears, pizzicato, in cellos and double basses (fig.45+10) (1’49”).

There is an additional motif that needs to be identified since it will recur in Part Two. It’s first heard when the soloist sings “Spinne, was spinnst du um mich?” (“Spider, what are you spinning around me?”) (ex.4) (fig.43+7) (0’58”) and it’s a suitably convoluted idea, woven first by 1st bassoon and then at fig.44+1 (1’03”) by 1st oboe and bass oboe, etc. Delius will quote it later in the fifth movement of Part Two (fig.113+1).

V. This is the climactic moment of Part One, and in mood it harks back to the more intimate passages of *Sea Drift* whilst foreshadowing the nocturnal magic of such pieces as *Summer Night on the River.* Overall the choral writing is the most lyrical we’ve yet heard, whilst the orchestration is suitably dark-hued and ‘greyer’ in feel. There are four separate sections, encompassing two emotional ‘peaks’: fig.49+9 (3’16”) and fig.53+9 (7’32):

A: *Andante molto tranquillo.* The basses of both choirs evoke the coming of night; the harmonic language remains chromatic but is anchored on pedal notes, i.e. the F natural in bars 1 to 12. The orchestration of the opening is most striking, Delius at his most typically imaginative as he combines horns, clarinets and bass oboe: just a handful of instruments but exactly the right ones. The baritone soloist enters (fig.47+11) (1’53”) with long-spun, lyrical lines.
B: *Poco a poco più agitato.* This brief section, a transition really, begins at fig.49+1 (2’49") and is propelled by repeated quaver movement in the cellos, commenting on the baritone’s feelings of unfulfilment and interspersing choral “ah’s”; this reaches a succinct climax (fig.49+13 et seq.) (3’29").

C: *Meno mosso, più tranquillo.* The orchestral textures are suddenly quite spare here, (fig.50+7) (4’00”), reflecting Zarathustra’s sense of loss and loneliness, and are rooted once more on pedal notes (fig.51+1) (4’41”).

D: *Meno mosso, più tranquillo.* The opening text of the movement returns (fig.51+12) (5’31”), “Nacht ist es”, and Delius repeats the material of his opening A section, if not note-for-note then in overall mood. Quite unexpectedly, growing from next to nothing, the music swells in just a few bars to a heart-rending climax (fig.53+9 et seq.) (7’32”) as Zarathustra cries out “nun erst erwachen alle Lieder der Liebenden” (“now awaken all lovers’ songs”). A motif heard fortissimo in bass oboe, bassoons, horns and violas (ex.5) (fig.53+11) (7’42”) will be be recalled at the climax of the fifth movement of Part Two; but for now, the texture rapidly deflates and, *calando al fine* (“dies away to the end”) to the sound of bass clarinet, a pair of horns, some soft punctuation from harp and timpani and lower strings fading out *pppp.*

PART TWO

Introduction: *Andante - On the Mountains*

This is an early example of Delius making an excursion to his beloved ‘High Hills’ and it’s one of his most exquisite journeys: horn calls echo across the peaks, high above misty valleys evoked by slow-moving chromatic harmony in muted violins and violas, while the lower strings remain with their feet on the ground, anchoring everything on plain C and F naturals. Delius only specified three horns for this section, but the most recent edition of the score sensibly suggests that the echo effects may be enhanced by putting the unemployed 5th and 6th horns off-stage (if logistically possible).

A magical transition occurs right at the end (fig.57+18) (4’35”) when the 1st flute unexpectedly enters and plays just four notes, *pppp*, while the harmony shifts to pure A major: it’s as if a shaft of sunlight has suddenly pierced the mists.
I. The musical equivalent of the opening pæan of Part One: another vigorous outburst by the double choir, but joined this time by soprano, contralto and tenor soloists. Again there are three main sub-sections, with the first and last mirroring each other:

A: *Con elevazione e vigore.* As before, Delius hardly establishes a key-centre before he moves off it: A major swiftly gives place to C major and to a harmonic sequence that doesn’t really re-establish the ‘home’ key until some twenty bars later (fig.59+1) (0’45”).

B: *Meno mosso, più tranquillo.* The soloists are heard as a trio (fig.60+1) (1’07”), observing that spring has given place to the height of summer (harps add a shimmer of heat-haze to the texture). The tranquillity is short-lived as the textures build again (fig.62+1) (1’55”) and the choral affirmations become more homophonic and declamatory. Ex.1 breaks out again (fig.63+1) (2’02”) in 1st and 2nd trumpets and trombones. There is a sudden hush (fig.64+1) (2’53”) as the three soloists breathe the phrase “Nachbarn der Sonne!” (“neighbours of the sun”) and then *tempo primo* bursts out again.

A₂: This is an exact recapitulation of section A with the same text and orchestration until six bars before the end (fig.66+9) (4’09”) when it diverges into the brief coda.

II. *Andante.* As in the opening of Part One, Delius follows an extrovert movement highlighting the role of the chorus with an introverted one featuring the solo baritone. It’s cast in one of the composer’s favourite metres, 6/4, and has the feel of much later works such as *An Arabesk* or *North Country Sketches* in its austere orchestration and harmony; it’s similarly infused practically throughout by downward-falling quaver figurations (fig.67+3 et seq.) (1’14”). Delius rests all the brass whilst retaining four of the horns. There are two particularly intense moments from the soloist: his “deine Rede wurde reif” (“your speech ripened”) (fig.68+4) (2’08”); and “ihr höheren Menschen, riecht ihr’s nicht?” (“You higher-born ones, do you not scent it?”) (fig.69+5) (3’02”).

III. This is the most substantial movement of the entire work and falls into five distinct sections:

A: *Lento.* Delius reflects Zarathustra’s mental anguish – “Wohl bin ich ein Wald und eine Nacht dunkler Bäume” (“I am indeed a forest and a night of dark trees”) – in this purely instrumental section which begins with woodwind
and hushed, muted strings *divisi* evoking a mysterious, amorphous texture reminiscent of Sibelius. The tempo picks up (fig.72+1) (2'02") (*con moto moderato*) with some plaintive writing for the cor anglais over tremolando violas and nervously meandering chromatic figurations in the woodwind (fig.72+9 et seq.) (2'29"). Meanwhile, a significant theme, associated with Zarathustra, is presented for the first time (ex.6) (fig.72+6) (2'20") by cor anglais, 3rd bassoon, double bassoon, cellos and double basses and from this point on it’s repeatedly woven into the texture.

B: Abruptly (fig.75+1) (4'25") the women’s voices of both choirs break in on Zarathustra’s rêverie in a pastoral 6/8, vocalising “La, la, la’s” which continue for some 44 bars, the tempo becoming more lilting at fig.76+1 (4'45") (*molto moderato, con grazia*) as Delius switches between 9/8 and 12/8 metres. The voices are lightly accompanied for the most part by dancing wind and strings, and there’s some effective writing for the harps. Delius’s notions of what the human voice can do – at least, choral human voices – is ambitious, to say the least. This section of the *Mass* is particularly difficult to perform. I quote just a few bars (ex.7) (fig.76+8) (5’12") to show what his demands are; if you didn’t know, you might have thought he was writing here for clarinets. Neither are the mocking “Ha, ha, has” (fig.77+7) (5’36") all that easy to bring off. As mentioned earlier, there is no ‘hiding’ for the performers because Delius refuses to double the voice parts in the orchestra as kinder composers might have done.

C: *Moderato.* The voices die away as the baritone takes centre stage again (fig.81+1) (6’48") for an extended monologue. Ex.6 is heard in the cellos and double basses with a variant of it later (fig.82+5) (7’49") doubled by 3rd bassoon and double bassoon. Dancing rhythms return at fig.83+1 (8’08") (*più leggero*); the text is at its most sibylline and the best course is to grasp at its meaning from Delius’s music. The ‘bell theme’ (ex.3) is quoted (fig.84+1) (8’29") in 1st and 3rd horns and in 1st harp, a bar before the sopranos of Choir 1 make the only choral intrusion in this section with some mocking laughter. The text at this point refers to Zarathustra’s previous penchant for sleep, and we remember how the contralto had prophesied that the midnight bell would eventually waken him. A rhythmic variant of ex.6 protrudes sternly in 3rd bassoon, double bassoon, cellos and double basses (fig.86+8) (9’44") as this section draws to a close.

D: *Con anima.* The women’s voices return in pages reminiscent of Section B, but with much thicker and more complex orchestral textures; indeed, the
dance becomes almost Bacchanalian and reaches a frenzy at fig.92+1 (12’01”) (tutta forza). It then rapidly calms down as tremolandi in 1st harp, 2nd violins and violas (fig.93+5) (13’03”) usher in the final section.

E: Lento molto. This is a beautiful coda to the movement, centred in B major until the D major of the final pages. The women are heard in the distance (fig.96+1) (15’57”) as night falls, the tempo slackens and the music dies away with just a last wisp of the vocalise lingering in the air.

IV. The text evokes symbolically the ‘noon-tide’ of Life with Zarathustra, as prophesied, content to doze in the torrid heat of day, refusing to relinquish his daydreams. Delius’s music encompasses some astonishing contrasts of mood and texture in this fairly extended movement; there are five shortish sub-sections:

A: Lento molto. An exquisite orchestral introduction with a pastoral mood tellingly evoked by a short modal ‘trio’ for 1st oboe, cor anglais and bass oboe (bar 1 to fig.98+15), the reed instruments stealing in softly one by one in imitation over muted lower strings and soft timpani rolls. The choirs also enters quietly (fig.99+1) (2’34”), followed by a short passage for the tenor soloist quoting some of Nietzsche’s most evocative lines to a delicate accompaniment. We seem suspended in Time: this is indeed “the secret hour of solemn silence when no shepherd sounds his flute.”

B: But the mood is momentarily broken as Zarathustra stirs (fig.102+1) (5’33”) and talks eloquently in his sleep of his heart-broken rapture; the choirs repeat his words (“zerbrich!”) like an echo (fig.103+1) (6’03”).

C: Even the contralto soloist seems anxious not to break the spell (fig.104+1) (6’37”), though the ‘bell theme’ is sounded very quietly as a warning (fig.104+13) (7’34”) in 1st horn and 1st harp.

D: Now the soprano soloist has her say (fig.105+1) (8’26”), and is then joined by the tenor soloist as the music suddenly explodes with passion in a fully-scored tutti passage (fig.106+1) (8’54”) which concludes with the double choir comparing Zarathustra to a god. Brass intone a solemn chord, there’s a pause and the opening mood is re-established (fig.107+1) (9’29”).

E: In the final section, the contralto attempts to waken Zarathustra (fig.108+1) (10’35”) above a bed of weaving, highly chromatic strings; but he will have none of it and prefers to remain basking in his drowsy “happiness”.

85
The choral voices whisper this desire like an incantatory refrain (“O Glück!”) and the movement comes peacefully to a close, winding down in the strings with delicate touches of 1st flute.

V: \textit{Allegro ma non troppo, con gravità.} A passionate, brief outpouring of Zarathustra’s resigned realisation that he is prophesying to deaf ears and that his message will never be widely understood. This baritone solo with chorus is in one, onward-sweeping section. There are two quotations of previous material, ex.4 from the fourth movement of Part One in the cellos and double basses (fig.113+1) (2’10”) at the chorus’s word “Nun kam Abend und Mitternacht” (“then came evening and midnight”); and ex.5 from the fifth movement of Part One, forcefully recalled (fig.115+5) (3’57”) by bassoons and full brass to the words “Lust ist tiefer noch als Herzeleid!” (“joy is deeper still that the grief of the heart!”) An F sharp timpani roll then links us directly to the final movement.

VI. The climax of the whole work unfolds in four sections:

\textbf{A: Largo con solennità.} With the timpani still present, the cellos and double basses take up Zarathustra’s theme (ex.6) which is then repeated by cor anglais, bass clarinet and 1st horn (fig.116+1) (0’39”) with an ostinato harp arpeggio added during the previous bar. The baritone soloist enters at fig.117+1 (1’30”) with his warning that the hour has arrived when the Midnight Bell will toll. The music modulates from B major into B flat (fig.118+1) (2’26”) and Delius writes a very fine passage indeed, Wagnerian in its majesty, that includes reiterations of Zarathustra’s theme (fig.118+2) in bass clarinet and then a few bars later in bass clarinet again, but this time reinforced by bassoons, double bassoon, 3rd trombone and tuba (fig.118+10) (2’45”) and with three glissandi from the 1st harp (fig.118+9 et seq.) and the ‘bell theme’ (ex.3) (fig.119+1) (3’02”) as additional orchestral colour to herald this solemn moment.

\textbf{B: Poco più mosso.} The tam-tam imparts its own aura of mystery (fig.121+2) (3’33”) before ex.3 underpins the texture in the form of a harp ostinato, reinforced by 1st and 3rd horns (fig.120+13) (3’45”); bell-imitations permeate this section. Zarathustra’s theme makes further important entries in the bass clarinet (fig.121+11) (4’36”) and then in cellos and double basses; the baritone himself grows more impassioned, with triplets and arpeggios infusing clarinets and divided strings as he calls his followers to attention. We are now ready to hear the great Midnight Song itself.
C: *Lento molto.* From fig.127+1(7’28”) Delius incorporates his earlier manuscript of the 1898 orchestration of the *Mitternachtslied*, musically identical except for the addition of soprano and alto chorus parts (fig.129+1) (9’30”) and then, in a contiguous reprise of the song by the full chorus, without the soloist. The accompaniment throughout, as in the original piano part, is based on ex.3.

D: *Più animato.* The final ode to Joy and to Eternity, “alle Lust will aller Dinge Ewigkeit!” (“All joy craves eternity for all things!”) (fig.132+1) (11’15”) involves not only the chorus but, significantly, the four soloists singing for the first time in the work as a concerted quartet. Delius gradually unleashes all his orchestral forces to reach a monumental climax *Maestoso con tutta forza* (fig.137+9) (12’50”) on the word “Ewigkeit!” (“eternity!”), with the bell theme tolling clearly above the thick texture in glockenspiel and timps; but the final sounds are, characteristically, not triple forte but triple piano: Delius releases the tension (fig.138+1) (13’08”) for the final eight bars as the chorus softly intones the word “Ewigkeit!” again, and the orchestration dims to a magical whisper of just lower woodwind, horns and strings, and bringing this extraordinary work to a deeply moving close.
Over a thirty year period, during the main creative span of his composing life, Delius’s scores frequently feature the human voice, whether in song, opera or choral works. A surprising number of these compositions contain passages where the voice is employed without words, either as solos or in chorus, and therefore instrumentally as an extension or enrichment of his orchestral forces. He was, of course, neither the first composer nor the last to adopt this possibility, but his output includes a significant series of important examples.

If A Mass of Life probably contains the finest ones, there are also many other instances of his using the human voice in this way. Indeed, it is almost certainly true to say that during the period between 1894-5 (when he was composing The Magic Fountain) and 1923 (when he completed the music for Hassan) no other composer, British or otherwise, did so with such regularity. It is interesting to consider, therefore, how this came about. Was Delius influenced by the earlier examples of other composers? Was it a device which merely suited his compositional style? Or was there some other influential factor?

The influence of earlier composers

Composers of the ‘classical’ period appear not to have discovered the often magical effect of the wordless human voice, and the practice seems to have emerged only in the later romantic era – and, even so, examples pre-dating Delius are comparatively rare. The earliest of these seems to be, not altogether surprisingly, from the pen of that great innovator, Hector Berlioz - who, in 1845 composed a Marche funèbre pour la dernière scène d’Hamlet, for chorus and orchestra. This was part of his incidental music for a performance of Hamlet, though the score arrived too late, and in any case the production was ultimately shelved for other reasons. The Marche, in the course of a slow processional of 118 bars, is punctuated at intervals by a wordless chorus intoning ‘Ah’ as a nobly rending lament rises, becoming more eloquent and agitated until it climaxes in a volley of musketry. This Marche was later added to other Hamlet music under the title Tristia, but at the time of Berlioz’s death in 1869 it was still unperformed, and it is unlikely that Delius would have heard this music.
Although his opinion of Bizet (and many other composers for that matter) tended to fluctuate, Delius generally held him in high esteem, preferring his music to that of most other French composers. It is possible, therefore, that he would at least have known Bizet’s incidental music for Daudet’s play, *L’Arlésienne*. This was commissioned around 1869 for performances by the Théâtre du Vaudeville which had recently moved into a splendid new building in the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. The music originally consisted of some 27 numbers, many of them brief, but including *mélodrames* and choruses, a number of which effectively employ a wordless chorus. The second of Delius’s *Two Aquarelles* certainly inhabits the same sound world as the ‘la- la’s’ in the second of the *Deux Mélodrames* in Act II. Sadly, the only music we are likely to hear today is in the form of one of the two *Suites*, the first of which was arranged by the composer himself and met with great success. Whether or not there were further performances of the play featuring Bizet’s music is uncertain, although it is possible that some might have taken place between 1888 and 1897, the period when Delius was in and around Paris.

It is well known that during his Paris years Delius associated with artists and writers rather than musicians and his circle included Strindberg, Verlaine, Zola, Gauguin and Munch. He had no real association, however, with, for example, Fauré, Gounod, Massenet or Debussy. Also, he was a slow starter, well behind the new emerging generation of composers which included Debussy, along with Ravel, Straus, Mahler, Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Delius was already 32 when he started work on his second opera, *The Magic Fountain*, and only a few significant works precede it - e.g. *Florida*, *Paa Vidderne* and *Irmelin*. Unfortunately we have very little information on Delius’s concert going habits in Paris, so we don’t know if he would have heard the early version of Debussy’s *Printemps* (1887). This was recently performed on Radio 3 in its reconstruction by Christopher Palmer, with a powerful and intoxicating role for a wordless chorus.

It is more likely that he might have attended a performance of Massenet’s *Thaïs* (1894), and, if so, he would certainly have noted the lovely wordless chorus in Act II which extends from the well-known *Méditation* at the end of Scene 1 into ‘Daybreak’ at the start of Scene 2.

Apart from these examples of ‘wordlessness’ by French composers, there seems only to be a single Russian example, namely the delightful children’s chorus in Act II of Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*. This ballet was composed in 1891-92 and was premiered at the Imperial Theatre in 1892. Although the composer’s *Nutcracker Suite* (prepared before the first performance of the ballet) became instantly popular in the concert hall, the ballet itself did not achieve
its great popularity until the mid 1960s and there seems to be no record of an early performance in Paris.

Florida

It seems far more probable that the short period which Delius spent in Florida in 1884 will provide the key to many of the wordless examples we will be considering. Christopher Palmer in his Delius, Portrait of a Cosmopolitan has some helpful comments. Describing the singing of the Negroes to Fenby, Delius said “they showed a truly wonderful sense of musicianship and harmonic resource in the instinctive way in which they treated a melody, and, hearing their singing in such romantic surroundings, it was then and there that I first felt the urge to express myself in music”. Palmer concludes “Small wonder that Delius so often resorts to voices distant, wordless and unseen, at moments of peak emotion. They may all be traced back to that revelatory experience on Solano Grove, when he first became aware of what was literally the ‘still, sad music of humanity’.

The orchestral Florida Suite of 1887 was Delius’s first response to his Florida experience. However, his first use of a wordless chorus came in The Magic Fountain composed 1894-95, some ten years after he left Florida. The composer was his own librettist and the score was the most ambitious he had so far created. Set in the sixteenth century, the story combines elements of the discovery of Florida with the legend of the Fountain of Eternal Youth. There are some wordless parts for the male Indians at the start of Act II, humming on “Hu-hu…” and at the war dance at the climax of the scene their squaws join in enthusiastically. In Act III, the Spirits of the Fountain (3-part women’s voices) have quite a lot of ‘la-la-ing’ as well as actual words.

Koanga (1904) was the second of a projected trilogy of operas which would picture the lives of the Indians, the Negroes and the Gipsies - although the plan was not entirely fulfilled, as the Gipsy element in A Village Romeo and Juliet is minimal. Act III of Koanga opens, magically, with an orchestral prelude evoking a swamp at nightfall. After a while wordless voices, tenors and basses answering each other with weird incantations, “Ah!..Ah!” are heard from afar over a sustained chord, anticipating the finale of Hassan.

Between The Magic Fountain and Koanga Delius composed Appalachia – Variations on an old Slave Song. Scored for baritone, chorus and orchestra, the chorus is sparingly used, perhaps under-used, not making its first appearance until about half way through a piece lasting around half an hour. There are four brief appearances of tenors and basses ‘la-la-la’ing’ which remind us that this music was based on a negro tune first heard by Delius in Danville, Virginia,
and add subtle colour to the orchestral score. Towards the end, the voices have a ‘worded’ passage “After night has gone comes the day…..” which soon leads into the final chorus, where they support the baritone soloist in “Oh honey I am going down the river…..” But most importantly those brief wordless passages remind us of the great influence on Delius of the sound of those unaccompanied negro voices, heard over the water on those still, perfumed evenings by the St John’s River - and they help to prepare us for the tragedy which finally unfolds as a male slave is shipped down the river and forced to leave his loved ones behind.

I think it is reasonable to conclude that the inspiration for Delius’s own earliest examples of wordlessness is more likely to be rooted in Florida than to have come from hearing or knowledge of earlier examples by other composers. However, during the period between The Magic Fountain and Hassan, the floodgates then opened, as it were, and there came an abundance of further examples by both British and foreign composers, some of the most notable of which were: Debussy’s Sirènes from Nocturnes (1900); Puccini’s ‘Humming’ chorus from Madama Butterfly (1904); Holst’s Savitri (1908) and Neptune from The Planets (1916); Nielsen’s Symphony No. 3 (1910); Scriabin’s Prometheus (1911); then Ravel in his full-length ballet Daphnis and Chloe (1912); Vaughan Williams in his Symphony No.3, ‘Pastoral’ (1916-21); Bliss’s Rhapsody (1919) and Rout (1920); and Foulds’s 3 Mantras – Bliss (1919).

**Two supreme examples of voices without words**

Without question, Delius’s finest use of voices without words was in A Mass of Life (1904-8) and The Song of the High Hills. Neither of these works could have been written by any other composer and both contain passages which evoke an entirely original sound world. They belong to a period when Delius had achieved full maturity, knew exactly what he wanted and how to express himself.

In A Mass of Life, the wordless passages appear in the ‘Dance-Songs’ which occur in each of the two parts. In the first, initially to “Ah”, the chorus provides an atmospheric setting for the tenor, soprano and mezzo-soprano soloists as they yearn for life and the dance with ‘voluptuous longing’. Soon the chorus’s “Ah” becomes “La-la-la”, and the dance is under way with an extended passage which brilliantly integrates the soloists with the chorus and orchestra and builds to a massive climax. These are extraordinarily effective pages, dominated by the dancing pulse of the chorus, until eventually the passion of the moment passes and the music sinks to a tranquil close, the chorus telling us “O man, mark well! What tolls the solemn midnight bell? I lay asleep”.

91
The only comparable use of a wordless chorus up to this time is perhaps in Debussy’s *Sirènes*, first performed in Paris in 1901. Did Delius hear or even know this music? Whether or not, it must be said that Debussy’s chorus is used more colouristically than rhythmically, whereas the dancing chorus in *A Mass of Life* is used in an entirely original way to establish the essential rhythm of the dance, although that could so easily, and more traditionally, have been achieved simply by using orchestral resources.

The second Dance-Song, the great centre-piece of the Second Part is introduced by an orchestral evocation of evening. The mood changes with the ‘La-la-la’s’ of the female voices representing young maidens dancing in a meadow, which anticipate the baritone soloist’s “Do not stop dancing, I pray, ye beautiful maidens”. The dance then resumes, wilder than ever, and finally comes to an end as the sun sets. Again, this is an extended passage of brilliant and effective choral writing, both independent and in support of the baritone soloist.

*The Song of the High Hills* was composed in 1911. Delius was very fond of Norway, having first been sent there by his father on business in 1882, and he returned there many times on holidays and to meet up with his friends. In his notebooks he recorded the ‘lonely melancholy of the highest altitudes’ and

![Image](image.png)

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912): *When flowers return* (1911)  
(Private collection)
this loneliness is found in the music, which is scored for a large orchestra and a chorus which is wordless throughout and used instrumentally to provide a special sonority. The composer instructs the chorus to sing on the vowel which gives the richest tone. During its composition, Delius became totally absorbed and unable to put the work aside - and “had great difficulty getting the wordless chorus right”. He commented “The human voices represent man in Nature; an episode, which becomes fainter and then disappears altogether”. To Delius lovers, repeated hearings of the magical sound of these voices, will never diminish their impact, and we would not quarrel with Beecham who wrote “The first entrance of the full choir singing as softly as possible is surely a stroke of genius, and of its kind without equal, either in him or any other composer”.

Some other examples of wordless voices

Delius continued to write for wordless voices from time to time throughout his life. For example, in Fennimore and Gerda (1909-10) a wordless tenor is heard, (“Ah…”) unseen and from the water, setting the mood at the opening of the Second Picture – and in the Tenth Picture, the garden scene, the Labourers in the Fields, busy with the harvest, have some ‘la-la’ing’ to do. Effective though they are, however, these do little more than underline the mood of the moment. In his incidental music for James Elroy Flecker’s Hassan (1920-23) Delius again used wordless voices essentially for mood painting. They appear first in a brief unaccompanied chorus ‘behind the scene’ and later in the Prelude to Act III there are female voices, again ‘behind the scene’. The closing scene (The Golden Road to Samarkand) opens with a lone, wordless, tenor voice.

Finally, there are the two unaccompanied wordless part-songs To be sung of a Summer Night on the Water – which are quite unlike any other works by Delius, and fall into a category of their own. They were composed in 1917 at Grez-sur-Loing – and although some of the inspiration may have come from the presence of the River Loing, flowing at the bottom of the garden, it is tempting to agree with Christopher Palmer (Portrait of a Cosmopolitan) that “we hear, probably with even greater accuracy than in Appalachia, what Delius heard as he sat on his verandah overlooking the river, enveloped in a haze of cigar smoke and listening to the sound of those voices improvising on the night air”. Without doubt the Hassan choruses emerged from a similar background, so we can see that the Florida influence never left him.
A legacy?

In spite of Delius’s substantial use of voices without words, it is not possible to say for certain how great an influence he may have had on later composers. It is the case, anyway, that there is no ‘school’ of Delius; composers probably realised that he had said all that there was to say in his (essentially) lyrical/harmonic style. Holst went his own way in Savitri and Neptune, and Vaughan Williams in Flos Campi and the 3rd and 7th Symphonies inhabits a different sound world, but might have admitted some small debt – as perhaps also Bliss in his Rhapsody. Daphnis and Chloe is interesting in this context: Ravel knew and admired Delius in his Paris years, and indeed made a vocal score of Margot La Rouge in 1904. Daphnis post-dates both A Mass of Life and The Song of the High Hills and, if he knew these scores, Ravel may have taken the idea of the ‘dance’ from the former and the way the chorus enters softly in the ‘Interlude’ at the end of Act II has similarities with its entry in The Song of the High Hills. However it must be said that the music of Ravel and Delius generally has little in common. In the second movement of Nielsen’s 3rd Symphony where solo soprano and baritone voices appear, there is at least one moment where we might be hearing ‘Delian’ voices across the water - and Scriabin, Bartok, Cyril Scott, Villa-Lobos, Sibelius and Foulds were among numerous later composers to explore the possibilities of wordless voices. They expressed themselves in their own way, of course, but the range and quality of the Delius oeuvre will stand for ever as a testament to a remarkable and original musical mind.

[This is a shortened version of the illustrated talk “Songs without Words” which the author gave to the London Branch at the New Cavendish Club on 10 September 2008. He is most grateful to Robert Threlfall for his helpful advice and guidance in locating examples of wordlessness in Delius’s scores.]
A MASS OF LIFE

A CONDUCTOR’S VIEW

MATTHEW ROWE TALKS TO THE EDITOR

[Matthew Rowe is a freelance conductor, working with a wide variety of ensembles both in the UK and internationally – among them the London Philharmonic Choir, of which he was until very recently the Assistant Chorusmaster – and he was one of the mentors of the ‘wannabee’ conductors in the BBC2 series “The Conductors” in August and September this year! On a much higher plane, he conducted what was evidently an exceedingly good performance of A Mass of Life with the Cambridge Philharmonic Society in King’s College Chapel, Cambridge in 1994 – the report of the concert in DSJ 114 is reproduced below]

Ed: It’s not given to many (if I may!) young men to conduct this marvellous and mammoth piece. How did you get the chance?

MR: I was lucky enough to be asked to become the conductor of the Cambridge Philharmonic Orchestra and its Chorus – which, although it gives occasional concerts in Kings College Chapel, is quite unconnected with the University. We decided to programme the Mass – but I frankly had little idea of what I was taking on. Everyone, though, was very enthusiastic, and off we went.

ED: Was King’s Chapel a good place in which to do it?

MR: It is, of course, a marvellous setting for big works, provided that you don’t mind hearing ‘sound’ rather than ‘detail’! Apart from the bigger cathedrals and the major concert halls in London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester and so on, there are actually very few places in the country as a whole where the work can be performed satisfactorily. The halls, though, aren’t really conducive places in which to listen to ‘religious’ music – and, particularly as the non–Christian text is happily no longer an obstacle to performances in
cathedrals and other big church buildings, the work comes off far better in them..

Ed: How long did it take you to rehearse?
MR: I worked with the chorus for between 2 and 3 months before the performance, but the first time we put the whole thing together, with orchestra and soloists, was the evening before the concert, and we had another ‘tutti’ rehearsal in the afternoon on the day. I was actually very pleased that the chorus was able to learn the music in that time, because, although at first glance it looks easy, a lot of it is really pretty ungrateful to sing, and hence there is a risk that the chorus will lose interest. It is therefore important to get the ‘note-bashing’ over as quickly as possible, and start concentrating on ‘what it’s all about’ and how everything fits together. In the big choruses, the sheer energy of the music makes it a ‘good sing’ – but it has to be said that, even so, the individual lines are not really interesting or rewarding to sing.

Ed Which are the hardest parts?
MR: Without doubt, although perhaps surprisingly, the movements
with the ‘La, la, la–ing’ and the ‘Ha, ha, ha–ing’. To a great extent, the success of a performance depends on how these sections go – and there is actually a great deal of it. In Part One, III, there are some 30 pages of the original vocal score where the chorus sings virtually nothing else, and in Part Two, III, apart from the long baritone solo (“Lasst vom Tanzer nicht ab”) in the middle there are another 28 pages of this kind of writing. Despite the naivety and repetitive nature of the words, and the ‘jog–trot’ 6/8, rhythm, however, the notes of those two sections are extremely difficult to master, even for a very experienced choir – Delius treated the voices as instruments, and in many ways the uneven, chromatic lines are even more difficult for the singers than they are for the players. In the big choruses, too, there are quite a lot of top B flats, Bs and Cs for the sopranos – and they are not only hard to sing, but, because there is a tendency to snatch at them, it can be difficult to get them really in tune. Incidentally, the first of those sections contains Delius’s almost unique use of fugal techniques – at “Das ist ein Tanz”.

Ed: But, while the chorus parts are not the most difficult in the choral repertoire – they pale into insignificance compared with the problems of those of the soloists…. So, what about the soloists?

MR: Well, primarily, they all need big, warm, but not overpowering, voices. There are places where the soprano soars over everything else; the mezzo – particularly for the marvellous “Oh, Zarathustra” in Part One, III – needs to be warm and generous; the tenor has the most operatic part of the four of them – for example “Zweimal nur regtest” at fig.18 in Part Two, III. The baritone needs to be a real baritone, not a high bass – I don’t think that the part goes lower than the C below middle C, and a great deal of it is above the bass stave – indeed there are a few top Fs that really have to ring out; his words have to be really clear – and, needless to say, he has to be totally sympathetic to Delius’s style.

Ed: It is well known that Delius’s scores rarely carry metronome markings. Does that cause problems here?

MR: I don’t think so – the music sings itself, in the sense that it is the words that dictate the speed. If one has a real empathy with the music, the right speeds just ‘come’, and it is relatively easy to know in the first rehearsals whether something is too fast or too slow. The “La, la, la” sections are happy dance music, pure and simple – and although the thought of all those ‘flower–bedecked’ maidens may not be terribly
appealing in 2008, we do have an instinctive feeling how fast they ought to be dancing.

Ed: Delius’s orchestras are almost always huge. Any thoughts on that—apart from the cost?!

MR: The orchestra is simply vast – triple wind, plus the famous bass oboe……

Ed: ……which 99% of the audience can’t distinguish from an ordinary one anyway!……*,

MR: Quite!…a bass clarinet and a contra-bassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones (unusually all tenors), lots of percussion (including bells and a tamtam), two harps and 68 strings! Notwithstanding the beautiful printing of the Collected Edition, the full score is black with notes – there are so many lines to squeeze on each page, and the print is so small – that it is quite impossible to ‘read’ any of it during a performance. You really have to know the intricacies of the score – although that is, of course, a major part of every conductor’s job!

One curiosity of the scoring is that at the beginning of Part Two: there are six horns, and Delius asks that two of them play offstage, echoing the music played by the other four on the platform, but there is no time in which they can get back onstage for the immediately following Con elevazione e vigore, which uses the entire orchestra. It could be that Delius envisaged that there would be at least eight horns – that would give the principal players a breather at various other points in the work (a practice often used today and known as “bumping”).

Ed: What do you think about the overall form of the work?

MR: I think that it is well constructed – the whole piece is a great double arch, and within each arch each movement has its own clear shape. Indeed, it’s almost symphonic – a huge single movement – not something that can be said of much Delius! The Animato – Con fervore beginning; the “Herauf!” start of Part Two after those totally magical solos by the horns, Auf den Bergen – one of the most ‘breath-holding’ bits in all Delius; and the Più animato at the very end, are like three huge towers holding the structure together. In Part One, after the opening movement, the music gradually winds down, through the baritone solo (“Erhebt eure Hertzen”) in II; then III, which is almost a slow movement, with the huge first ‘La, la, la’ contrasting central section, and a calm ending. After the fresh eruption of joy which follows Auf dem Bergen, there are two more basically slow movements
- III, with the second “La, la, la” section, mirroring III in Part One, and IV – and the Allegro ma non troppo, V, is the final ‘tower’.

Ed: I hope that we haven’t criticised the work far more than it deserves! As we have said, it does present many logistical and musical challenges – where you can do it, the size of the orchestra, the difficulty of the chorus parts, the need for the conductor to be able to see it as a whole, and so on – but in performance it can be quite overwhelming. Particularly in the three big choruses, it’s one of the most exhilarating choral works ever written – while some of the quiet moments are simply spellbinding.

MR: You are right – it is an enormous challenge! I remember standing there, with this huge sound all around me, filling the Chapel, thinking that the performance was at last actually taking place, and how immensely lucky I was to be conducting it – one of the most fulfilling moments of my life.

* See Robert Montgomery’s article in DSJ 140.

These records [The Water Music, Rakosky March, L’après-midi, Coq d’Or excerpts, and Ravel’s Impératrice des pagodes (Ma mère l’Oie) – with the Hallé Orchestra] still seem to be only fairly successful. I hope Mr Harty will give us records of Berlioz’s Symphonie Fantastique: the brilliant, absolutely sure orchestration should come out well, and the work is a classic in its kind. But I beg of him not to attempt Delius: he was miles away from the inner essence of Brigg Fair; indeed, only the beautiful tone of the strings rescued the performance from artistic disaster. The woodwind passages were very clumsy.

Compton Mackenzie: The Gramophone, January 1925.
A MASS OF LIFE AT CAMBRIDGE


A summer's day, a Cambridge quadrangle at dusk, the breathtaking splendour of King's College Chapel, the music of Delius - a delicious combination. Doubtless many members will regret missing this uniquely enjoyable occasion, but unhappily information was received too late for inclusion with the Journal.

Aside from the beauty of the venue, its modest dimensions compared with those of a concert hall afforded an intimacy rarely experienced in such a vast score. There being less space to fill, all four soloists easily held their ground, and very accomplished they were too. They represented the most balanced quartet yet heard in this work by this reviewer, without a weak link. Mr Herford was splendidly commanding in the arduous baritone role, with clear articulate German.

The acoustics of the chapel were not ideal for this sort of music. The great Invocation came over as a vast welter of thrilling sound with no quarter given to those attempting to follow the words. Despair set in, but the quieter movements following sounded well and by the time the next outburst came I had been won over by the performance.

It was a reading of predominantly expansive tempi, the quiet passages lovingly dwelt upon and the louder ones allowed to develop most impressively. If things occasionally came almost to a standstill as Mr Rowe became intoxicated by the radiant beauty of the music, the listener's attention was never lost. The chorus was superb (as they always are nowadays) and occasional broken horn notes were as irrelevant as surface noise on a treasured old recording. Mr Rowe held performers and audience transfixed from start to finish. A glorious, uplifting end to a perfect day.

Jonathan Maddox

From DSJ 114.

[Unfortunately, in the scanning, many commas have come out as full-stops. Ed]
A MASS OF LIFE

TWO INTERVIEWS WITH ROY HENDERSON

A MASS OF LIFE FROM THE SINGER’S STANDPOINT

[This article first appeared in the Wrexham Leader of 4 August 1933, in connection with a performance at the Eisteddfod, and was reprinted in DSJ 44 (1974)].

Born in Edinburgh in 1899, Roy Henderson studied at the RAM, from where he leapt to fame in the 1925 performance of the Mass under Klenau, and within a year Musical Opinion was asking: “Is he the long looked-for soloist for Delius’s Sea Drift?” From 1925 until 1944, he sang the part of Zarathustra in all the British performances of A Mass of Life.

The famous British baritone who has sung the principal role of Zarathustra in every performance of Delius’s masterpiece during the past twelve years, and who has made a special study of Delius’s music [was interviewed by] Norman Cameron:

Singers are, not unnaturally perhaps, apt to criticise any musical work firstly from their own viewpoint - “Is this music singable and what scope will it give me?” - and secondly from the standpoint of its interest and value as music. So perhaps some excuse should be made for a colleague of mine whose only comment as he came out of Queen’s Hall, London after hearing his first performance of Delius’s masterpiece, A Mass of Life, was “What ungrateful stuff to sing.” I must admit that in my student days at the Royal Academy of Music when I first tackled a Delius score - this was at a time when Delius’s music was not nearly so well-known as it has become during the past few years - my instant reaction was ‘This is fiendish stuff: appallingly difficult, almost impossible to sing’. All the same, it fascinated me and I determined to persevere. Then came a period of what seemed vain and profitless labour at music of which I felt despairingly, as no doubt members of the Eisteddfod Choir felt during their early practices, that I should never be able to make anything [of it]. Yet, almost before I realised it, this music had become part of myself; had got a hold upon me in a way that no other music in all my experience has ever gripped me. Now, I would rather sing Delius than anything else. The better I know it, the more his music grows on me - more than that of any other composer living or dead. I have sung the part of Zarathustra at every
performance of the *Mass* since 1925, and I find myself looking forward to these performances for months in advance with an excited anticipation quite apart from my usual feelings regarding concert engagements. But I would be the last to pretend that Delius is easy to sing. In the first place, he is apt to score the choral and orchestral parts of his works so lavishly that it is often difficult for the soloists to penetrate the mass of sound sufficiently to make themselves heard. Of course, much, if not everything, depends upon the conductor’s skill in keeping the balance between chorus, orchestra and soloist at the more gloriously crowded moments.

Again, much has been said and written about the awkward intervals Delius expects his singers to compass. My own view is that many singers exaggerate this difficulty. Delius does occasionally ask us to achieve big jumps from high notes to low ones, but as his tempi are generally on the slow side, the singer has nearly always time to recover. At all events, Delius is not so great an offender in this respect as composers like Parry and worse still, some of the ultra-moderns whose writing for the voice is simply not ‘vocal’ at all and at whose door lies responsibility for much of the bad singing we hear today. As a matter of fact, Delius’s vocal line is as good as most composers’ and often better than Wagner’s, for Delius conceives a work as a whole, whereas Wagner too often seems to have forgotten all about the vocal parts until it becomes necessary to write in something for the singers at the last moment.

That Delius is apt to write for the voice as though it were another orchestral instrument (thereby obtaining many unique and breathtakingly lovely effects) is probably due to his individual method of composing. How many people know that when Delius composes a work he thinks of it at once in full score with every part in place? The common practice of thinking out themes and then orchestrating them has never been necessary to him.
But, being a genius and, fortunately, having received the minimum amount of academic training, Delius can afford to be a law unto himself. For genius can break every academic rule and remain genius still, and to my mind, there is little doubt that Delius’s music will endure when that of most contemporary composers is forgotten. Even today, he has probably more adherents - musicians and ordinary music lovers alike - than any other living composer.

I would like to think that those among our Welsh audience who will be hearing A Mass of Life for the first time will realise that it is impossible to understand fully so tremendous a work upon first hearing; realise also that this very fact is the surest proof of the music’s intrinsic greatness. And to those who may have heard one of the previous broadcasts of the Mass and found it not only incomprehensible but also ‘rather terrible’, as some not-too-musical friends of mine described it to me after listening-in to a London performance, I can only say: Follow the example of those same Yorkshiremen who, at my urgent request, gave the work a second trial (this time in the concert hall when we sang it in Leeds) and were entranced by its beauty and instantly converted to Delius and all his works.

A conversation with Stephen Lloyd

[On 18 August 1986 Stephen Lloyd, then the Editor of the Journal, talked with Roy Henderson at his home in London. The following is an edited transcript of that conversation, which originally appeared in DSJ 92 (Winter 1987), and omits a lot of material about Mr. Henderson’s other roles.]

SL: Can we start at the very beginning, when you sang the part of Zarathustra in A Mass of Life at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert in April 1925\(^1\) with Paul Klenau\(^2\) conducting? Were you still a student?

RH: Yes. They say I was 24, but I was 25. I’d won some prizes at the Royal Academy and two members of the Philharmonic committee had adjudicated a couple of them. The trouble was the baritone [Percy Heming] cried off about a month before the concert. Unfortunately all the well-known baritones couldn’t do the rehearsals or the concert. Nobody was available, and they were considering sending to America for a replacement when I think probably Percy Pitt said “There’s a young baritone at the Academy I gave a prize to a month or so ago...” - and they risked it. I got a telegram from John Tillett (I was singing in Manchester at the time) asking me if I would sing this part for the noble fee of 10 guineas! Fortunately I was able to find a copy in the Manchester library
and I looked through it and sent a wire (six pence in those days) accepting the engagement. I took the copy out of the library and lived with it for the three-and-a-half weeks I had left. I was singing in a number of concerts during that period so I hadn’t got all the time to study it. I took it to bed with me (I was unmarried at the time!) and I used to go to sleep looking at it. To me it was quite modern music for its day. I’d never known any Delius before except for the odd song, but I was very lucky with Paul Klenau the conductor, who was exceedingly helpful.

He took me through the part. We had perhaps three or four rehearsals with piano and he taught me a good deal about the work. When it came to two days before the concert and we rehearsed for the first time with the orchestra, I found I could sing it without needing the score. I’d always been taught by my professor, Thomas Meux, never to look at the book, always to learn everything from memory. I still believe that’s the only thing to do. I don’t think you know a work unless you can put the book down. Anyway, when it came to the concert I put the book down, thinking nothing of it. As a young man you don’t have the nerves you have when you are 40. It was only in the middle of the first solo that I felt a tiny bit of nerves, an anxiety. Fortunately I knew it so well that I could go on; for about six bars I felt very awkward. After that I had no trouble whatsoever; I’d finished with nerves and I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

SL: You made a tremendous impact on the critics.
RH: I didn’t realise that I had done anything special until the next morning when I saw the press and I was astonished. Mind you, all the other soloists had their noses in their books, and it’s not very easy stuff for them; that trio with the chorus is difficult. And there I was, standing up and looking as if I knew exactly what Nietzsche was talking about. Actually, I’d read his book, in translation – even then I couldn’t fully grasp what he was talking about! Ernest Newman wrote that I was a philosopher but I’m no more a philosopher than anyone. But I always believed that the first responsibility of a singer is to the poet – he’s got to make the words tell, and he has to live those words in the context of the music. So diction was very important to me; that was a matter of practice. Being a Scot probably helped me to make the words clear. The next day I went back to the Academy a student, not realising what I’d done. Until then I was only slightly known in London. I had given a Wigmore Hall recital to let the agents Ibbs & Tillett know me. That was the sort of thing you had to do in those days. I had just got engaged, and my fiancée got all sorts of friends to come, and I cleared £34, which was marvellous. It didn’t particularly do me any good musically; a couple of notices, perhaps, but that was all. It was the Mass that did it. That made all the difference in the world.
– in one night it put me on 7 or 8 years.
SL: Did Beecham attend that concert?
RH: He must have done, because he said afterwards to me that it was terribly slow. But I didn’t realise that, of course; I just enjoyed it. I got to love Delius’s music during that time, not knowing anything about him.
SL: You went on to sing Sea Drift for the first time, I think, in 1927, with Beecham?
RH: I enjoyed doing Sea Drift as much as anything, and when in 1929 I went to the Decca Company (they had asked me to join them as a baritone in their first recordings) I asked if we could do Sea Drift and they agreed. So we recorded it — a dreadful record, you can hardly hear a word anybody is singing! Decca then had little idea of how to record a choir, and they only used one microphone, as I remember. Anthony Bernard was the conductor.
SL: Your next Mass was with Charles Kennedy Scott in 1928. What was he like?
RH: Well, he was a choral conductor, and a splendid choral conductor. He trained choirs marvellously. It was a good ordinary performance, but not one of those electric ones. There was a very odd one I took part in, in Wales.

Letter from Delius to Roy Henderson after Beecham’s performance of A Mass of Life at the 1929 Delius Festival
SL: The 1933 Eisteddfod performance?
RH: In an enormous tent! I’d never seen such a big tent in my life! I don’t know how many thousand people were in it; it was rather like the inside of Alexandra Palace, a huge place. The conductor, T. Hopkins Evans, was very keen on the work. After the performance, people wanted to go on singing, to have a party! It was dreadful — you were up to goodness knows what hour of the night. The next morning I got up as early as I could, because I was playing in a cricket match that afternoon in London. I did a performance of the *Mass* in Liverpool, in St George’s Hall, I remember [1936], and there was another one in Glasgow with Wilfred Senior. I persuaded him to do it. I used to sing every year for his Glasgow Choral Union, and I told him that we had to do the *Mass*.

SL: I believe you sang in *A Mass of Life* with Beecham six times, including one BBC performance in 1934 that had originally been intended to be sung in German?
RH: We had a bit of a row together over that. Beecham had engaged Hermann Nissen as Zarathustra, and they were to sing it in German. The choir and everybody else had to learn it in German, and I think it was 4 days before the concert when Nissen conveniently had a cold - I say conveniently because I am not certain that he had learnt it properly. Possibly Beecham wanted him to sing it from memory and I don’t suppose Nissen had ever thought of that. Anyway, he cried off. Then the BBC wanted me to do it and they rang me. I said that I would do it, but not in German, because I wasn’t going to have my nose in the book having learnt it from memory. Also, for two of the days before the concert I was singing elsewhere and I wouldn’t have time to learn it in German in four days. So the BBC got on to Beecham and told him that it was no good. Beecham got in touch with me and said “The BBC say you’ll sing it in English. But I want it in German. I told them you can learn any damn thing at any time!” And I replied, “Well, I can’t, Sir Thomas. I’ve got two concerts that I have to do.” He said, “Oh, we can cancel those, and the BBC will reimburse you.” But I said, “I don’t do that sort of thing. I’ll be glad to sing it in German if you’ll give me a month and postpone the concert. Otherwise I’ll sing it in English.” The BBC said that they couldn’t postpone the concert, to which Beecham said “Suppose I don’t conduct this concert ... Well, we shall get Adrian Boult to conduct.” I’ve yet to hear of Boult conducting Delius! In the end Beecham conducted it, and the choir had to change over to English from German. Beecham and I got on very well when he came back from America. He asked me if I could send him soloists for *Irmelin* [in 1953]. I went up to Oxford to hear it.
SL: Did you always sing the *Mass of Life* in English?
RH: Yes, and it had always been sung in English at that time in this country. The performances I enjoyed most of all those were with Harty. I persuaded him to do the *Mass*. I knew him well by then because I used to train a choir in Nottingham for him, the Sacred Harmonic Society. One day I happened to be in Nottingham when Harold Williams was singing *Sea Drift* the next night, and I asked Harty “Shall I come and give the leads to the choir?” and he said, “Do.” He was conducting his *Mystic Trumpeter* as well and it was the first time he’d conducted in Nottingham. We got through the rehearsal of *Sea Drift* with a lot of effort; the choir weren’t really prepared for it. When it came to *The Mystic Trumpeter* he said to me after 3 or 4 pages, “They don’t know it, Roy!” It ended with him conducting something else with the orchestra instead.

SL: You said a moment ago that you persuaded Harty to do the *Mass of Life*.
RH: Yes, I did. He looked at it and liked it immensely. He was such a great accompanist and I felt with Harty that there was a sort of joint effort; whatever I did, he responded to, and whatever he did, I responded to. I enjoyed that performance and so did Delius. He wrote me a letter afterwards saying that it was the best performance he had heard. The Halle repeated it again the next year [1933].

SL: Which parts of the Mass did you particularly cherish?
RH: I used to like “Night falleth; now awaken all the songs of lovers”[Part One, V] and I loved “As eve descended”[Part Two, III]. Klenau made me sing that very softly and he got the orchestra right down. That’s a lovely phrase. I also sometimes sang the ‘Lyre Song’ at recitals with piano.

SL: What were the main differences between Beecham’s and Harty’s approach to the Mass?
RH: Beecham treated the singer rather like a member of the Orchestra. He said to me “You may not notice any of my beats, but the first beat of the bar you’ll always know. I’ll always give you the first beat - the rest might do anything!” You had to be with Beecham absolutely. You weren’t quite the individual you could perhaps be with Harty. But there was something else. Perhaps it was because I was more attuned with Harty. I knew him better, he was a friend. He was “Hay” and I was “Roy”, and so on, while it was “Sir Thomas” (though he’d call me “Roy” later). I knew too what Harty felt, having worked with him a lot. I felt we were together.

Another man I felt ‘together’ with was Fritz Busch, at Glyndeboume. He and Harty were the two conductors I felt most at home with. Adrian Boult was one of the real gentlemen. “Is this tempo all right for you?” he would always ask the singer. Beecham of course would do nothing of the sort, but he was
a great conductor of Delius. In my opinion there is no-one after Harty’s time that has come near Beecham.

SL: Very often there seems to be something missing in modern Delius performances? Can you suggest what it is?

RH: It is that ability to be flexible. You can’t be completely a tempo all the time. There are one or two places where you must be, but there should be a flexibility and a phrasing allowing the orchestra to phrase when they have the chance, which comes so many times in Delius, especially with the woodwind. But it’s that change of tempo which is not marked that makes such a lot of difference. And even in the songs it’s just the same. I used to find that in a song like To Daffodils, for instance. A strict tempo is impossible; it needs great flexibility.

1 This was only the work’s third performance in this country, the two earlier performances, in 1909 and 1913, having been conducted by Beecham

2 Paul von Klenau (1883-1946), a Danish conductor and composer (whose works include 3 symphonies, several operas and an orchestral score Bank Holiday: Souvenir of Hampstead Heath). He worked with Max Schillings at the Stuttgart Opera, and was noted on the Continent as a champion of Delius’s works. In Frankfurt on 1 March 1923 he conducted first German performances of North Country Sketches, the Cello Concerto (with Barjansky) and The Song of the High Hills (for which Grainger prepared the chorus) in a 60th birthday concert for Delius. He gave the Mass on 23 & 24 February 1925 in Vienna, Eventyr at a RPS concert on 25 February 1926, and Paris on 1 December 1927 with the Liverpool PO.

3 Newman wrote in the Glasgow Herald: “The great thing in the performance, after the conducting, was the singing of the baritone music by Mr Roy Henderson... .In him at any rate we had someone who was both artist and philosopher: it would be difficult to imagine better Delius singing.”
[This is an edited version of an article in DSJ 59 (April 1978). The tenor Francis Russell was born at Tongrefail (“Sound of the Anvil”), Glamorganshire, on 12 December 1895. Between the ages of 12 and 24 he worked in coal mines, but he then started singing, and joined the Carl Rosa Opera Company on a three-year contract. After two years he asked for his release because he realised that technically he was not ready. After some time in London he borrowed £1,000 from various people and went to Milan, where he studied under Ernesto Caronna for three years. He was then given a Covent Garden contract to sing with Elizabeth Rethberg in Madam Butterfly. Unfortunately two days before his debut, he became ill with double pneumonia and was in bed for three months. Caronna had come to London especially for that performance, as had Otto Kahn, who was the financial backer of the Metropolitan, New York. After his recovery, however, Russell sang at every prominent festival in Great Britain in the 20s and 30s.]

Now came my opportunity to sing, in October 1931, for the first time the tenor role in A Mass of Life under Sir Thomas Beecham at the [Leeds] Festival.* The other artists engaged were William [sic – actually Lillian!] Stiles-Allen, Muriel Brunskill and Keith Faulkner. Unfortunately, Faulkner developed a nasty cold and Mr. Henderson was called in to substitute. At the performance, the usually very reliable Yorkshire choir fluffed their entry before the entry for the tenor, and Sir Thomas tried to bring me in. It was far too early, but he said “Come on!” I retorted between my teeth “Shut up!” I had the vocal score and he, as usual, was conducting from memory. When that movement was finished the late WH Read, who was leader of the orchestra, said to me as I sat down “You were right and TB was wrong.” I said “I know”, and held up my vocal score. We continued on with the work until the interval, when TB said, “Thanks very much, my dear fellow.” I simply looked him and remained silent. But the beauty of this work struck me then, and has remained with me, even at the age of 82, as fresh as ever. Here comes the tragedy – I heard the work done a few times by other conductors, but nobody understood the depth of this great work like Sir Thomas Beecham.

Some two years later we did a performance at Queen’s Hall, rehearsing in the morning with the same soloists as at the Leeds Festival; we came to
the section Auf dem Bergen and we had the incomparable playing of Leon Goossens (oboe), Robert Murchie (flute) and Jack Thurston (clarinet). We soloists sat and were enthralled by the sound produced by these players and by the artistry of Sir Thomas. In fact we could not talk. Here were the glorious flute, oboe and clarinet players giving of their very best. I have never experienced anything like that again. Sir Thomas understood the work; others, such as Malcolm Sargent, failed to do so. This was the finest performance of the Mass that I have ever heard.

Subsequently, Sir Thomas and I had a difference of opinion over certain things and I did not again sing the Mass for him until he had to have me at the Albert Hall in 1946. With his usual facility for changing artists, he had substituted Redvers Llewellyn for Roy Henderson. I was not actually engaged for this performance, and only because the late Frank Titterton was not musical enough to sing the work was I brought in. (Here I must say that I extracted from the BBC a contract which I had wanted for some time, viz, to sing for them a series of modern English song programmes.) As soon as I arrived at the morning rehearsal at the Maida Vale underground studios, I found my old female colleagues there and was naturally given a very warm greeting. TB also greeted me with his usual aplomb, but I remained very cool. We started the rehearsal, and here I found Llewellyn foolishly singing loudly and giving all he had. I warned him, saying “He [Sir Thomas] will take all from you now, but if you do not succeed at the concert you will be ignored.” Subsequently, as I had predicted, this is what actually happened. The baritone sang himself out, and then said he’d caught a cold – whereas if only he had listened to my advice he would have been successful on the appropriate occasion — which was a Saturday afternoon in the Albert Hall in October 1946. Thank heaven it was one of my best performances, and I was singled out by the press for my knowledge of this work. I take no credit for the latter, it was simply because I had been the regular tenor in earlier performances, and I was emotionally and vocally inside the part.

---

* That was the remarkable morning concert that also included Brahms’s Third Symphony and (by a curious coincidence in the present context) the first performance of Pervigilium Veneris, a choral work by the Editor’s grandfather, Frederic Austin – while in the evening there were just the first performances of Eric Fogg’s recently revived The Seasons and Walton’s Belshazzar’s Feast.
A MASS OF LIFE

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

Lyndon Jenkins

As my contribution to this discussion of Delius’s great choral work the Editor has given me carte blanche to recall some of the performances that I have been fortunate enough to hear over the years. Since A Mass of Life is perhaps the one work of Delius that is capable in the course of an evening of conveying his genius in rounded and well-nigh total form, this is no hardship. Only the stage works are comparable in size, but they are a different matter altogether while the Mass is, of its kind, a masterpiece. It may not be Delius’s masterpiece – I suppose that if pressed most Delians would award the palm to Sea Drift – but it surely is Ein Meisterwerk.

I’ve been in no doubt of its stature ever since my first ‘live’ hearing of it in 1964. Our two-year old Society was already encouraging us to support Delius’s music at concerts, and somehow I managed to get to London to attend both the choral rehearsal one night and the orchestral one the following morning. That first rehearsal was something to behold. I’d seen Sir Malcolm Sargent in action before at concerts and on TV (I’d even sneaked into one of his rehearsals at our festival in Swansea) but for the first time I witnessed at close quarters how effective he was with a choir. I was certainly unprepared for his sharpness when one of Delius’s awkward corners produced a mass stumble: later on, when I knew him better, I recognised that with interested spectators present he would have been especially annoyed that everything was not perfect: all the same it was impressive enough. But next morning was something else: when I heard those magical, quiet orchestral interludes floating on the air in the empty Royal Albert

![Sir Malcolm Sargent](image)
Hall, the sounds seemed from another world. I remembered Eric Fenby saying about becoming ‘intoxicated’ with the music, and suddenly I understood what he meant. To my surprise that slight figure could be seen prowling around the deserted promenade area, deep in thought. Suddenly he walked across the floor to the platform and, leaning up, drew Sargent’s attention by attacking his legs. The Maestro, not one used to having his legs attacked, looked down in surprise, but the few words they exchanged explained all. “Gentlemen,” called Sir Malcolm to the orchestra, “Mr Fenby wants you to know he’s never heard more beautiful playing in this work than you are producing this morning.”

During the rehearsal break I wandered the Hall’s labyrinthine corridors, trying not to get lost. Suddenly I turned a corner and there, coming down a wide staircase, was Sargent himself. “Good morning,” he greeted me briskly, “who are you?” I tried not to be tongue-tied, and he became more interested when I said I’d been at his rehearsal the night before. “I’ve done a bit of conducting,” I ventured, “and am very keen …” or something like that. “Well, if you’d like to come to more of my rehearsals speak to Miss Darley in my office. She’ll arrange it.” As he turned to go, he asked, “Are you a Delius lover?” adding, without waiting for an answer, “Did you know Mr Fenby’s here?” Indeed I did, and that morning rehearsal was not the only time I saw him that day. Walking up to the Albert Hall in the evening I caught him up. He knew me vaguely, but he seemed in a reverie and I hesitated to break the spell; after a decent interval, however, I asked him what he was thinking. “I was remembering walking along this same pavement on my way to Beecham’s performance with this same choir in 1932,” he replied.

The Mass that evening amazed me. I always think hearing a work ‘live’ for the first time is especially exciting, but seeing all those forces responding inspirationally (as it seemed to me) to Sargent was among the greatest of my early experiences. I was familiar with the music, of course, from Beecham’s recording of a decade earlier, but in the Albert Hall it expanded and glowed, ebbed and flowed in what seemed to be a quite new and thrilling way. The magic of those interludes from the morning remained. I itched to get my hands on a full score, but one was beyond me then and Boosey & Hawkes’s octavo edition did not appear for several more years.

Two years later, in 1966, Sargent’s prestige enabled him to put the Mass into the Proms for the first time, but sadly that season was his last and, after his death the next year, Delius’s music in toto struck a lenten patch at the concerts. All the same it was the BBC that provided my next opportunity to hear the work again, when they announced a studio performance in June 1971 at Maida Vale under the Russian conductor Rozhdestvensky. There was real interest (he
was later to essay *The Song of the High Hills* and the Violin Concerto) but, as the *Mass* approached, illness intervened and he was substituted by Norman Del Mar. The outcome was the happiest possible: the conductor was already admired as a reliable Delian, but on this occasion he excelled himself. After the echoing spaces of the RAH the confined studio brought the music bang up against one’s eardrums, so to speak, so that if the opening chorus was now as overwhelming as Sargent’s, the thrill was partly for additional reasons of aural perspective. As the performance went on it seemed touched by inspiration, a combination of sinew, fire and eloquence in exact proportion. Much of its quality was later to be gleaned from the CD recording that briefly appeared on the Intaglio label, enabling us to relive it all, so that many came to recognise it as second only to Beecham’s in terms of a studio performance.

It was during the 1970s that I came to appreciate more fully the extent to which performances were influenced or affected in one way or another by the acoustic in which they were heard. The dry response of London’s Royal Festival Hall, for instance, did little for estimable accounts by Meredith Davies and Charles Groves: the big choral moments had impact but in the many quieter passages the music never expanded properly and simply sounded under-nourished. Manchester’s Free Trade Hall was kinder to an enterprising Hallé performance under Barbirolli’s associate conductor, Maurice Handford, in 1977 that I recall as a highly creditable account from an unexpected source. It was not quite unforgettable, unlike one critic’s review of it that said blandly, ‘Where it mattered most, in the last thirty minutes, Mr Handford got everything together and the spell was cast’. That singular piece of tosh has never escaped my memory, much as I wish it would. Among other venues, Delius’s score generally found itself favoured by England’s Victorian town halls and similar buildings. Not always, however: when Norman Del Mar conducted it at Norwich in 1979 in the diffuse surroundings of St Andrew’s Hall one
hardly recognised it as fundamentally the same reading that had made such an impact in London eight years before. On the other hand Hanley’s splendid Victoria Hall sprang to the music’s aid when Philip Jones crowned the Keele Delius Festival with it in 1982, greatly assisting his clear-headed and sensitive handling of the score’s multiple features to make a really strong impression.

Much the same effect was achieved in 1984 when Christopher Robinson’s City of Birmingham Choir introduced the work to Birmingham in its historic Town Hall. Surprisingly, given the city’s long history of choral first performances (ranging from Mendelssohn’s Elijah and Dvorak’s Requiem to the big Elgar premières, all conducted by their composers) it was its first hearing, and so handsome amends for the lapse were made to mark the 50th anniversary of Delius’s death. Some altogether thrilling choral singing, with the Choir scaling Delius’s heights fearlessly and tirelessly, made a great impression in the medium size 1834 building – actually a greater impression than when, a few years later, the same forces mounted the Mass again in the wider ambience of Symphony Hall. On that second occasion the Birmingham forces were happily augmented by the Oxford Bach Choir, with which the conductor had already given an interim performance in 1988 at Warwick University. Now, with Oxford and Birmingham throwing in their lots together, he was able to weld choral and orchestral forces to achieve the power the work demands, while his easy familiarity with the score never allowed the long passages of relative inactivity to sag. If anything was missing it was just that the work sounded a mite comfortable in such a big hall and, as a consequence, its overall impact was marginally reduced.

And so to 1988 and the Proms again (though only for the second time) and Sir Charles Groves giving unquestionably one of the greatest performances of the Mass I’ve heard (a view I believe shared by Delians who were present). For once everything conspired to provide the ideal circumstances, beginning with the twin decisions to give it in the original German and at last without any break, so that the work’s arch-like structure...
could be fully appreciated. I had assumed that there would be the usual interval, so in a pre-concert interview with Sir Charles it never occurred to me to raise it. Nor did he mention it, preferring to concentrate on what he saw as ‘the main problem’ in conducting the work (indeed, he emphasised to me, any Delius work): ‘Getting the tempo right and securing the ebb and flow of the music. For choruses,’ he went on, ‘it is hard work. They need stamina and guts, though fortunately the three big choral outbursts with the high Bs and Cs are neatly spaced out.’ Those few practical comments of his hardly prepared me for the amazing way he directed things on the night. The music came across in one great sweep, and it almost seemed as if we were hearing it for the first time. A near-full house, whether sitting or standing, hardly seemed to move a muscle during its hundred or so minutes. It was so good that even the critics acclaimed it, using phrases in their reviews that had not been heard since Beecham’s time. Best of all, they called it one of the choral masterpieces of the European repertoire, and even went so far as to declare it fit to be placed alongside similar works of Mahler, Schoenberg and others … Amazing how a really good performance of something can lead to a completely changed perspective and attitude.

I have not listed all the soloists heard over the years, although one notices names such as Kiri te Kanawa and Lesley Garrett in the casts at various times, together with other stalwarts such as Marjorie Thomas, Richard Lewis and Benjamin Luxon. The baritone has the largest share, of course, and it was a long time before the critics could be persuaded to stop recalling Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau’s singing in Beecham’s final performance in 1951 (the only time that conductor gave the work in German), generally to the detriment of native singers. For many years John Shirley-Quirk or Thomas Hemsley were first choices in the part. All Englishmen, of course, inherited the mantle worn throughout the 1930s period by Roy Henderson and, at Beecham’s 1946 Delius Festival, the young Welshman Redvers Llewellyn. He, poor chap, had less than a month in which to master a large, complex and difficult work that was familiar to him at that moment only by its title, so his apprehension may be imagined. After a few weeks’ intensive study, not much wiser and with the Albert Hall looming, there was nothing for it but to appeal to Beecham for help. “Yes, I know it seems to go on and on about nothing at all, but with the band it sounds grand,” was all the great man said. Thus encouraged – if he was – the young singer resumed work, and actually went on to make a great success of it.
A MASS OF LIFE

THE RECORDINGS

Lewis Foreman

In comparing the four commercial recordings of Delius’s *A Mass of Life*, particularly doing it blind (i.e. without knowing which recording is which), one quickly realises how good all four are. Beecham’s recording of Delius’s masterpiece was the first, and now that it has been reissued on CD, many would say the unsurpassable best, but it is in mono and he faces stiff competition. Yet without a doubt his recording is a notable document of a great tradition of performance, and furthermore has clearly influenced those that have come since, for many of the timings are within seconds of his. Beecham’s opening chorus runs 5’ 23” by my stopwatch, the slowest, Hickox, 5’ 39”, so there is clearly nothing in it, and tempi do not play a part in the success of the opening, though the impetus that Beecham generates is irresistible.

We should perhaps start by listing the four versions, all of which are sung in German:

Sir Thomas Beecham
Rosina Raisbeck (sop); Monica Sinclair (contralto); Charles Craig (ten); Bruce Boyce (bar); London Philharmonic Choir; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Recorded between November 1952 and May 1953 (8, 11 November; 8, 10, 12, 13 December 1952; 1, 20 January, 10 April, 14 May 1953). Sony Classical SM2KK 89432

Norman del Mar
Kiri Te Kanawa (sop); Pamela Bowden (mezzo); Ronald Dowd (ten); John Shirley-Quirk (bar); BBC Chorus & BBC Choral Society; BBC Symphony Orchestra. Live broadcast from Maida Vale, 3 May 1971. Intaglio INCD 702-2

Sir Charles Groves
Heather Harper (sop); Helen Watts (contralto); Robert Tear (ten); Benjamin Luxon (bar); London Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra. Studio recording at the Kingsway Hall, 15-20 March 1971. EMI 7-64218 2 now on CMS 764218-2
Richard Hickox
Joan Rogers (sop); Jean Rigby (mezzo); Nigel Robson (ten);
Peter Coleman-Wright (bar); Waynflete Singers & Bournemouth
Symphony Chorus; Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Recorded at
The Wessex Hall, Poole Arts Centre, 5 – 7 July 1996. Chandos CHAN
9515 (2)

The HMV boxed LP set ‘The Music of Delius’ (SHB 32) also included Beecham’s
longer – and remarkably self-indulgent – radio talk on the work (5 June 1951)
which incorporates ‘On the Mountains’, the Prelude to Part 2, recorded by EMI
on 8 May 1948 with the RPO and Dennis Brain. The only recording of anything
from A Mass of Life from before the War, the Prelude to the third movement
of Part 2 (vocal score pp 135-7) with the LPO and Beecham dates from
11 February 1938. Beecham also plays, with a conductor’s eloquence, the
opening of the ‘Midnight Song’ on the piano. A different, shorter talk reappears
on the CD reissue of Beecham’s recording.

I have also listened to four performances on tape: Richard Hickox in
St Paul’s Cathedral (3 July 1996) with Peter Coleman-Wright as Zarathustra, as
in Hickox’s Chandos CDs; Sir John Pritchard at the Festival Hall (5 December
1984) with BBC forces and Benjamin Luxon as Zarathustra; Sir Charles
Mackerras in the Usher Hall Edinburgh (Edinburgh Festival 1 September 1984,
broadcast: 4 November) with Jonathan Summers as Zarathustra, and finally a
broadcast conducted by James Gaddarn with Trinity College of Music forces
from the Fairfield Halls Croydon (recorded on 26 March and broadcast on BBC
Radio London 9 July 1984) with some curious microphone placings that make
for fascinating listening of a performance in which everything did not go well.
1984 was clearly a year of BBC broadcasts of A Mass of Life.

Despite Beecham’s reputation, it has to be said that all the CD versions
convey the spirit of the work with some eloquence and I have focussed on
what for me are the key moments in making comparisons. These are the
opening chorus, the interplay of the soloists in the third movement; the huge
baritone role of Zarathustra; ‘On the Mountains’, the orchestral interlude for
horns at the beginning of Part Two, and the ‘Midnight Song’.

When EMI announced in 1972 that they would be preparing a new recording
of the work with Sir Charles Groves, it caused considerable excitement at the
prospect of the most up-to-date stereo sound (in Kingsway Hall) and a line-up
of the leading British singers of the day – Heather Harper, Helen Watts, Robert
Tear and Benjamin Luxon. One’s considerable expectations from this casting
were and are entirely realised; if the set has any limitations they surely stem
from too much care being taken – especially with the choir who when compared to Beecham are a little solid, and that is first noticeable in the opening chorus.

The del Mar recording was a BBC broadcast, the conductor chosen at the last minute when the planned Gennadi Rozhdestvensky was indisposed. Its release on CD on the Italian Intaglio label only came about – together with the rest of that remarkable series – because of a nuance in copyright law that made it legal to issue it off-air (presumably from transcription discs) in Italy. The audience is remarkably quiet, and it has all the strengths of a live performance that no-one anticipated would find its way onto CD, as well as a conductor, Beecham’s protégé, having the unusual freedom given by responding to the inspiration of the moment without the long slog of rehearsals.

Chorally all are good, and the way that the BBC choral forces hold the pitch in del Mar’s live BBC performance is remarkable. In a sense Beecham’s mono recording of the chorus and the orchestra is a triumph of HMV’s recording technique at the time, the huge sound wonderfully focussed and remarkably well balanced, indeed I sometimes wonder how much that focussing of the sound has to do with our view of it as one of the legends of the gramophone.

All four baritones are terrific, though Bruce Boyce in Beecham’s reading is notable in maintaining an eloquent legato in the more fast flexible music. John Shirley-Quirk for del Mar, having taken a little while to get into the role, takes off remarkably, and a young Benjamin Luxon for Groves is intoxicatingly virile. Probably the least good among Beecham’s soloists is the soprano Rosina Raisbeck – not that she is not very good indeed, but she has a quality to her delivery which for me gives it a period feel. Perhaps Heather Harper for Groves is the best of the sopranos, but a young Kiri Te Kanawa is not to be missed on del Mar’s recording. The contraltos – or mezzos – are also all very distinguished artists – Monica Sinclair, Pamela Bowden, Helen Watts and Jean Rigby. If I prefer Pamela Bowden for del Mar for her lovely line and characteristic sound,
there is very little in it, and it is a small part.

The weak point in the work can be the ‘la-la’ choral singing, notably in the third movements of each part, and it is here that Beecham is in his element in making it work. This is music that can bed-down into something that becomes too solid, and Beecham’s springing rhythm gives it life with a dancing fleetness that carried all along.

The Prelude to Part Two, ‘On the Mountains’ (vocal score pp 105-6), that wonderfully evocative exchange of quiet horn calls, is a passage to make orchestral horn players quake—nothing can be more exposed. Beecham, with the Royal Philharmonic’s principal horn—at the time he had none other than Dennis Brain—and he is magical, miraculous. Brain also works his magic on the previously unissued extract from 1948 included in the LP set ‘The Music of Delius’ where it is an illustration in Beecham’s talk. Groves is more matter of fact and if his player is also clearer he is also faster in music that needs to find a space to echo and re-echo. Perhaps most remarkable is the BBC’s live recording at Maida Vale where del Mar (himself a one-time orchestral horn player) and his BBC horns hold us gripped by a haunting reading.

The Beecham was first issued in the UK in November 1953 on two Columbia top-price LPs. I have long had it on the contemporary American boxed set on Columbia Masterworks (Set SL 197) with its silent surfaces. Later it appeared on Fontana, and after an interval at bargain price on two CBS LPs. Now on CD we are at last given the recording history, for formerly it just said “1952”, but now it is clear that it was recorded over some six months, making the headlong impetuosity and flow all the more remarkable. Beecham conducted many live performances of the Mass but only one of them was in German. One might have expected this to have been some kind of barrier, but in fact in using Delius’s original language for the recording seems to have triggered Beecham and the singers to a remarkable freedom.

So, in summary, four marvellous performances and if any of them did
not exist we would be delighted with the others. The Beecham is, of course, something very special, the culmination of a lifetime’s first-hand exploration of Delius’s greatest work, but if mono sound has its limitations for you my favourite of the remainder is the live broadcast by Norman del Mar, who in that unflattering acoustic of BBC Studio One at Maida Vale worked miracles with a notably strong team. Though even here the soloists – notably Shirley Quirk – can be less well balanced than one would like (in places Shirley-Quirk is heard better in EMI’s studio sound for Groves), but in their recording Chandos with Hickox achieve that balance superbly. Indeed for a state-of-the-art, sumptuous, sound stage Chandos are unbeatable, with a grandly authoritative Zarathustra, and some remarkable pianissimi (as well as the great climaxes) only possible on CD. Overall for me the least compelling is Groves, and though I must have heard more live performances conducted by him – always rewarding, remember the 1970 RFH or the 1988 Prom? – than anyone else, and while, when it was new, his reading was championed for its clarity and sound, now with Beecham refurbished for me on CD, he has least magic.

Incidentally when the Hickox recording was first issued by Chandos, a company normally celebrated for its elegant and atmospheric CD sleeve designs, it bore a cover picture of a baby that was quite the nastiest design I have ever seen on a CD, so nasty in fact that I did not purchase the set. All is now retrieved however, as it has been reissued with a much more neutral design – so if you shared my initial reaction I recommend getting it now while it is still available.

I must just say a few words about that other great Delian, Sir Charles Mackerras, for whose swift-paced 1984 Edinburgh Festival performance the soloists were Heather Harper, Sarah Walker, Philip Langridge and Jonathan Summers; the performance was particularly cherishable for Langridge in his youthful prime. Indeed, listening to it on tape for this survey I must say the interplay of tenor, soprano and alto soloists in the third movement challenges the best of the commercial recordings.

And to end on a sad ‘might have been’ – writing this at the time of the passing of that great conductor Vernon Handley, I am reminded that half a lifetime ago he programmed A Mass of Life at one of his Guildford concerts (when his horns had some difficulties in ‘On the Mountains’) and that in 1984 he included A Mass of Life among his Desert Island Discs when he was interviewed on the celebrated Radio 4 programme. After his German broadcast of the complete A Village Romeo and Juliet, he expressed a strong interest in recording the major choral works of Delius – and there still is no recording of A Mass of Life in English!
Unknown Sculptor: Statues of Nietzsche at Reucken, near Leutzen in Saxony (his birthplace)

No-one seems to have done a philosophical study on why some men prefer bowler hats to figleaves
THE FRENCH JAUNT

Malcolm Walker

Twenty-five members of the Delius Society joined forces with 22 of the Peter Warlock Society in what was described by the organiser as a “jaunt to Bourron-Marlotte and Grez-sur-Loing”. Also in the party were ten musicians of the Guildhall Brass Ensemble under their director Eric Crees, and a number of ‘civilians’ including the broadcaster Humphrey Burton and Michael White, formerly chief music critic of The Independent, taking us up to 57 in all. Malcolm Rudland Enterprises Unlimited (the organiser) booked 46 of the party onto the 12.30 pm Eurostar service from St Pancras International to the Gare du Nord in Paris on Friday 4 July. (The planned impromptu rehearsal of Warlock’s The Cricketers of Hambledon outside the latter did not happen, as we might otherwise have all spent a weekend in Parisian police cells!). The group were then transferred by coach to our hotel in the village of Ury in the Fontainebleau forest, where we were joined by the remainder of our party who had made their own way, most from England, but two from the deepest region of the Pyrénées.

Saturday was spent in Bourron-Marlotte where we wandered down Heseltine’s Passage singing The Cricketers of Hambledon (for which a song sheet was supplied) to the accompaniment of the musicians. As the weather was overcast and rain threatened, umbrellas were in evidence. The party then visited the garden of Philip Heseltine’s painter-uncle Arthur (1855-1930) where we were entertained with Pieds-en-l’air from the Capriol Suite, conducted by Malcolm Rudland. The studio was light and airy, and contained examples of Arthur’s work – some of which, seen 78 years after his death, were surprisingly modern. Rejoining the coach we then moved to the Mairie for more music. Unfortunately the rain had by now become more persistent: the musicians had to play under cover in an adjoining courtyard, whilst those listening also found suitable adjacent undercover space. Our ever-resourceful organiser had diplomatically planned to begin with La Marseillaise (again with words provided) and God save the Queen: both were sung with fervour and commitment. Then followed Joseph Horovitz’s Fanfare and March, originally written for Chelsea Pensioners (hence the less than quick tempo). The tenor Danny Gillingwater sang four Warlock songs in excellent fashion – Jillian of Berry, My own country, Piggesnie and Captain Stratton’s Fancy – capturing the many facets of the composer’s writing splendidly. The Guildhall Brass Ensemble followed with the complete Capriol Suite in a fine arrangement.
by Eric Crees. More songs in which members of the party joined in included One more river, Fill the cup, Philip and Maltworms. As Sir Richard Rodney Bennett is President of the Peter Warlock Society, we then had the memorable Waltz from his film score for Murder on the Orient Express, for which the conductor was Malcolm Rudland. His balletic poise on the rostrum can only be compared to that of Fred Astaire at his finest! More songs followed, with all of us joining in, and the concert concluded with imaginatively realised arrangements (also by Eric Crees) of Warlock’s Four Cod-pieces. How can anyone ever again take César Franck’s Symphony or Beethoven’s Fifth seriously?

A superbly prepared three-course lunch with wine was provided in a hall adjoining the Mairie: our French host did indeed do us proud. We then returned to the Mairie itself, and saw a series of paintings that had been donated of artists who had worked in the area in the colony’s golden days of artistic life. The quality was varied, interesting and mixed in scope. The final event of the day was a trip on the narrow gauge railway at the Tacot des Lacs. This was to mark Philip Heseltine’s first published writing – a piece about the railway in his late teens. The Delius Society’s motive power expert, Brian Radford, gave us a resumé of the railway’s history. Although having done the journey back in 2006, it was very good to repeat it.

On the Sunday morning, we drove to Grez-sur-Loing and the Delius house, where we were met by the present owner Jean Merle d’Aubigné and his family. Even 74 years after the composer’s death, the house still maintains a special aura for Delians. In the garden, we wandered down to the river’s edge – and soon the musicians were ready for us, seated under the high trees near the gently flowing water. A brief extract from In a Summer Garden opened the concert, followed by The Cuckoo and To be sung of a summer night on the water (the wordless tenor part being assigned to the french horn and magically played by David Kay). Alan Gout’s arrangement of Walk to the Paradise Garden was the
centrepiece of the event, after which came the *Air and Dance* – all of them in special arrangements made by Eric Crees, who conducted everything except the concluding piece, *Sleigh Ride*, which was splendidly directed by Malcolm Rudland. The whole event was magical – and hearing Delius’s music live in his own garden, something I never ever expected to experience. The wind in the trees and the leaves rustling during the playing of the music just added to the occasion: it was all so appropriate. As Jean d’Aubigné so aptly said afterwards “It was like being in a cathedral”. We then walked up the garden for drinks most generously provided by the d’Aubigné family. In his inimitable manner, our President made a delightful speech thanking our hosts and presented Jean Merle with a copy of *Frederick Delius and Peter Warlock: A Friendship Revealed*. Taking our leave of Grez we then adjourned for lunch prior to making our return journey to the Gare du Nord.

One must pay tribute to the young musicians (all students) of the Guildhall Brass Ensemble under Eric Crees’s inspiring direction. The fact that they were able to be with the group was down to the generous sponsorship of an anonymous member of the PWS who, sadly, was unable to make the trip.

No praise can be too high for the organisational skills of Malcolm Rudland. Everything was thought-through and executed in a most professional manner. The success of this memorable ‘jaunt’ was largely due to his attention to detail and planning. Happily the whole event was recorded on film and, it is hoped, will be available on DVD at a later date.

© Malcolm Walker 2008
AN EXTRAORDINARY COINCIDENCE

Charles Barnard

Two years ago, I moved into an apartment in a house called Danny, which was built in 1590, and nestles under Wolstonbury Hill on the South Downs, ten miles north of Brighton. Perfect Bax and Ireland country. Sitting in the walled garden, it is a joy to play their music, as well, of course, as that of Delius.

There are 26 residents in the house, and, speaking to one of them a while ago, I happened to mention the Society. “How interesting” she replied, “Delius was my great uncle. Clare Delius was my grandmother”!

So Mary Gribbon and I have interesting talks about the family. Mary told me that her mother used to visit Grez on several occasions before 1914. Soon after the war, Mary’s mother married, and moved to Burma, where Mary was born. Her mother, Barbara Black, had lots of time on her hands, and so took to writing romantic novels. These were extremely successful, and she became the Barbara Cartland of the 20s and 30s. Interesting to reflect that she made far more money from her writing than her famous uncle from his music!

Mary never met her great-uncle – it was 1938 by the time she returned to England permanently. On a recent visit here by Mary’s daughter (who lives in Canada), I took her to see her distant relation’s grave at Limpsfield. It was sad to see it so overgrown, especially since the Society contributes towards its upkeep.

These records [The Water Music, Rakosky March, L’après-midi, Coq d’Or excerpts, and Ravel’s Impératrice des pagodes (Ma mère l’Oie) – with the Hallé Orchestra] still seem to be only fairly successful. I hope Mr Harty will give us records of Berlioz’s Symphonie Fantastique: the brilliant, absolutely sure orchestration should come out well, and the work is a classic in its kind. But I beg of him not to attempt Delius: he was miles away from the inner essence of Brigg Fair; indeed, only the beautiful tone of the strings rescued the performance from artistic disaster. The woodwind passages were very clumsy.

Compton Mackenzie: The Gramophone, January 1925.
THE WALK TO THE PARADISE GARDEN ————
or SECOND THOUGHTS ARE SOMETIMES BEST

Robert Threlfall

The charmingly (though misleadingly) named Entr’acte from the last act of Delius’s most famous opera has rightly become one of his most popular pieces. It must also stand very high amongst his whole output for characteristic beauty of harmony and orchestration; it is interesting, then, to recall that its composition was an afterthought as it were, following completion (but preceding performance) of the opera, to allow adequate time for the complicated change required between scenes 5 and 6. The original orchestral interlude written at this point was a mere 45 bars long, of which the first 15 are all-but-identical with the revised version. (A facsimile of Florent Schmitt’s piano transcription was reproduced as plates 4-5 on pages 36-7 of my Catalogue of the Compositions of Frederick Delius.) “The Entr’acte of the Village R. was composed or changed in 1906 for the Berlin performance” wrote Jelka Delius to Philip Heseltine on 28 Sept. 1929, “. . . at once after the Mass of Life and just before or in between Songs of Sunset”. (This statement convincingly disproves, once and for all, the occasionally-repeated claim that it was at Sir Thomas Beecham’s suggestion that the Entr’acte was extended; it is clear that Delius carried this amendment out well before he and Beecham ever met.)

After Beecham’s performances of the complete opera for the first time in England in 1910, he included the Entr’acte (or Intermezzo as it was sometimes announced, though the extended title was used as early as 1914) in a number of concert programmes, occasionally preceded by the “Dance at the Fair”. Some m/s material from his library suggests that the original, full scoring was used on these occasions. At about the same time Delius, well aware of such opportunities for performance, commenced pressing his then publishers (Universal Edition) to make the pages in question available separately, so as to obviate hire of the complete opera material; but many years passed before his requests (which were repeated in 1925) were heeded. Meanwhile the opera had been revived by Beecham at Covent Garden in 1920. It was at his suggestion that the curtain was then raised at the emotional heart of this long interlude (maybe also to ensure that the audience remained quiet?) and Delius pencilled the necessary stage directions into his own copy of the full score (now in the Trust’s Archive). When Universal reprinted the vocal score in 1921, these instructions were extended and included for the first time; likewise for the first time (in the printed score) was the movement then
entitled *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*.

The opera was next staged at Wiesbaden in 1927 when, somewhat exceptionally, Emil Hertzka (the owner of Universal Edition) managed to be present; the question of a reduced or cued-down version of the whole score for practical reasons was subsequently discussed at his suggestion. Although it was many years before this project was actually carried out (by Igor Buketoff in the 1970s), Delius had raised no objection in principle, provided that the assignment was sympathetically handled. Meanwhile a reduced orchestration of the *Intermezzo* (for double woodwind etc.) made by Keith Douglas was put in hand for separate publication by Universal in 1928; “of course” Delius wrote on 19 March “I do not want this version to be played when a bigger orchestra is available”. Delius also insisted that the proofs be sent to Beecham for approval before printing. This was duly done but, for whatever reason, Universal failed to ensure their return; with the result that the separate score of this version was not issued until 1934 (UE 10579) and then without the benefit of Beecham’s examination. (A piano solo arrangement had meanwhile been separately published in 1931 (UE 3555) extracted from Lindemann’s piano score of the complete opera. A different piano arrangement, by Harold Perry, was later issued by Boosey & Hawkes.)

Keith Douglas next prepared a slightly shortened version of the Fair Scene (entitled *Waltz*) “rearranged for performance by concert orchestra” and this was published in 1939 (UE 11106). It was laid out “with an optional link leading to the”earlier-published *Intermezzo*, and it acknowledges the “advice and help” of Sir Thomas Beecham in its preparation. Shortly after, Beecham issued his own rearrangement of the Intermezzo for the same reduced orchestra of double wind etc. “in order to bring the work within the scope of smaller orchestras” and this was published by Boosey & Hawkes in 1940 (B&H 8375) as a full score and orchestral set; a miniature score followed. Needless to say this version is copiously edited with Beecham’s characteristic additions to or modifications of the original dynamics; also some equally-characteristic string divisions are suggested at the moment of the lovers’ embrace. Wartime economies may well have been in part the reason for his retention of the reduced forces (as already established by the Douglas version) in his many subsequent performances. Increasingly, however, in recent years the elimination of the third woodwinds and (above all) the absence of tuba and contra to reinforce the bass in the climactic B major section has been regretted by many commentators. Quite recently, for example, a fresh version has been prepared by David Lloyd-Jones (to be made available through the Boosey Hire Library) which uses triple wind and restores the tuba.
A recent letter to me from Lyndon Jenkins enclosed details of a programme
given by Beecham in December 1939 which included The Walk. The programme
note (written by Edwin Evans) clearly implies that the Intermezzo (thus
headed) “begins with a reminiscence of the scene at the Fair” (viz, the final
orchestral outburst at cue no. 35 in the full opera score). Beecham’s own m/s
material for the Fair scene (which retained Delius’s full orchestration) gives
no indication of this point ever being used as a commencement. Of course,
Evans’s programme note may just have been taken “from stock”; but the
thought remains that Beecham may have used the just-published Douglas
version of the “optional link” before continuing with his own (surely reduced)
version of The Walk.

A word on the tempo indications is appropriate. After the hurly-burly
of the Fair in scene 5 of the opera, the 16-bar link to the Entr’acte (which
Douglas retains but Beecham does not) is appropriately marked piu tranquillo.
A rall. molto in the last few bars settles into Molto lento as the Interlude proper
starts. In the full score this was modified to Moderato after four bars. Beecham
not surprisingly struck out the “molto”, as also the subsequent “Moderato”.
However his own practice, as shown in his later separate publication (and
idealised in his memorable 1948 broadcast performance) was to commence
the Interlude very slowly and gradually quicken over the first 8 pages or so
of his edition (which gives appropriate metronome indications at each stage
of the journey). This (printed) edition likewise indicates mutes for the strings
at the start — but without any note of when they are to be raised (since the
copyist of the score for the engraver’s use was himself mute on this subject).
Usual practice as carried out by Beecham (and Norman Del Mar) is to remove
the mutes around the point where the 3-flat key signature is cancelled,
replacing them about 16 bars before the end of the movement.

In my opening sentence I referred to the now-ubiquitous title of the
movement under consideration. It may not be generally known that in the
earliest source still available - Florent Schmitt’s piano score - the opera itself
was entitled Le Jardin du Paradis. It also appears that this soubriquet had
been given to Jelka’s garden at Grez by some of the Delius’s friends. How
mundane, then, to find that in the closing scene of Delius’s opera the actual
place dignified with this poetical appellation had by then become a somewhat
run-down hostelry (exhibiting, among other attractions, what I believe is now
known as “Adult Entertainment” - if the recent splendid video recording is to
be believed). What’s in a name, indeed? As Peter Palmer has so well expressed
it (in a thoughtful article in the Summer 2007 Musical Times):
For Gottfried Keller, the beer garden’s name is ironic. But for a
timeless moment Delius saw only the idyllic beauty which it implies.

© Robert Threlfall, 2008

A personal postscript:
This short essay is in memory of my late dear cousin, Eileen Larcombe, who with me
attended an early performance of Ashton’s ballet interpretation of the piece in 1972.
When she remarked to me “What a beautiful title” I had to remind her that it was
merely the name of a rather seedy pub. Just as the curtain was about to ring up at
the start, she asked me “When did Delius write this?” to which I could only hurriedly
reply “Don’t ask awkward questions”, for at that time I had not satisfactorily
established the exact chronology of its composition in my own mind.

A REVIEW OF DIFFERENT ORCHESTRAL VERSIONS

Tony Summers

The Walk to the Paradise Garden must be one of the most frequently played of
Delius’s orchestral works, but it is strange to realise that nowadays we scarcely
ever hear it played in the orchestration that Delius originally wrote. How did
this situation come about, and why do the reduced orchestral version that we
usually hear today perhaps not best serve Delius’s original intentions?

The Walk is an orchestral interlude between Scenes 5 and 6 of A Village
Romeo and Juliet and the preceding article by Robert Threlfall explains how it
came to be its present length. Like the rest of the opera, The Walk was scored
by Delius for a massive orchestra based on quadruple woodwind and six horns
(see Table below); in fact, the only instruments not used in The Walk which
feature in the rest of the opera are the orchestral percussion and the on-stage
instruments used in the wedding and fairground scenes.

Sadly, performances of The Walk with the original scoring are rare. It is not
possible to hire orchestral parts of it as a separate item: a concert organiser
wishing to programme it would therefore need to hire parts for the entire opera. Also, the number of woodwind and horns required is unusually large and for many orchestras it would mean taking on extra players – all for a work lasting less than ten minutes! But if one has the chance, a performance using the original scoring is worth hearing: in the final B major tutti the massed woodwind and brass blaze forth with a Mahlerian intensity, emphasising the contrast with hushed strings in the closing bars and enhancing the overall dramatic effect of this magnificent work.

Beecham popularised concert performances of *The Walk* from the early 1920s; he almost certainly played it in the original orchestration, probably from a set of parts of just the interlude in his possession. Robert Threlfall’s article explains how the smaller orchestral version by Keith Douglas came to be sanctioned by Delius. Its scoring is shown in the Table below, and it was eventually published by Universal as part of their ‘salon orchestra’ series. Douglas’s orchestration is much reduced from the original, and seems to have been aimed more at light orchestras of which there were many at the time (the use of ‘harp or piano’ would tend to support this). Nevertheless, Douglas’s version was often played in the 1930s and is still listed in Boosey & Hawkes hire library - but it is seldom heard today, having been replaced by Beecham’s reduced version.

The scoring of Beecham’s version is shown in the Table below, and is very similar to Douglas’s orchestration. As Beecham’s version is almost always the one played today, it is worth looking more closely at how this differs from Delius’s original. The most obvious difference is the reduction in the number of wind and brass instruments: Delius has 28, Beecham only 17. Throughout most of the piece Beecham skilfully and imperceptibly manages to adjust the orchestral texture to cover for the missing instruments, but the loss of weight in the *tutti* is noticeable, especially as his reduction involves elimination of 3 crucial low woodwind and brass instruments: the bass clarinet, contrabassoon and tuba. I have listed below the key points in the work where I think Beecham’s version sounds significantly different from the original. Bar numbers and rehearsal marks refer first to the Beecham score, and in brackets to the corresponding place in the Collected Edition score of the opera. (My comments are confined to differences in orchestration, but there are many other differences in Beecham’s version involving dynamics, string markings and so on which Robert Threlfall has discussed in his article).
Different orchestrations of *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Delius</th>
<th>Douglas</th>
<th>Beecham</th>
<th>Summers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flutes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oboes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (2nd doubles CA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cor Anglais</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarinets</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass Clarinet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassoons</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrabassoon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horns</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trumpets</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trombones</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harps</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>1 (or piano)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Delius writes for 2 harps but harp II is only used in places to double harp I. All versions have a timpani part and the usual string section.*

**Key differences between Delius’s and Beecham’s versions**

**Bars 2-7 after fig 1 (bars 8-13 after fig 39):**
Delius has a cor anglais solo throughout this passage (which Douglas retains in his version). Beecham (inexplicably) switches to oboe after 2 bars (though he may have felt that the original solo, at the top of the instrument, was risky**).*

**Bar 3 after fig 1 (fig 40):**
Beecham omits a horn written B flat (and in the violas the last 2 quavers should B natural).

**Bar 2 after fig 2 (2nd bar of fig 41):**
Delius has a bass clarinet solo which Beecham omits, though it could have been put on the clarinet (Douglas gives it to the bassoon).

**Fig 3-5 (fig 42-44):**
Beecham lacks a contrabassoon so he has to omit the lowest woodwind line throughout this section.
2 bars after fig 4 (fig 43):
Beecham lacks a tuba and has to re-voice the trombone chords with the bass trombone on the lowest line.

Bars 2 & 3 after fig 6 (fig 45)
Delius puts the pp chord under the horn solo on 3 trombones and tuba. Lacking a tuba, Beecham has rescored the chord for trombones and bassoons - the sound is quite different. (Douglas substitutes a horn for the 1st trombone).

Bars 1 & 2 of fig 7 (fig 46):
Beecham’s score omits a horn written F sharp - the only instrument sustaining that note at this point. But this note does appear in the orchestral part! It was in Beecham’s orchestral material but was overlooked by a copyist when the score was prepared.

Bars 3-7 after fig 8 (fig 47):
Delius has a bass clarinet holding a low written F sharp (bars 3-4). Beecham includes this but on the clarinet, so it sounds an octave higher. Lacking a 2nd oboe, Beecham has to rescore slightly in bars 4-7 by substituting the 2nd flute.

Bars 1-6 after fig 9 (fig 48):
Beecham puts Delius’s bass clarinet solo on the clarinet but is forced to shorten and alter it because the clarinet lacks enough low notes (Douglas gives the whole solo to the bassoon)
In bar 6 Delius has a chord on 3 bassoons, Beecham simply omits the 3rd bassoon (but Douglas uses the 2nd horn to complete the chord).

Fig 11-13(fig 50–52):
This is the climax of the work which Delius scores in an unusual way. Everyone is playing except the double basses, so the lowest line of the harmony is carried by the tuba and contrabassoon. Beecham lacks these weighty instruments; he has to re-voice the trombones and bassoons and introduce the double-basses to compensate, but the overall sound has much less impact than the original.

Bar 6 after fig 14 (fig 53):
The violas’ first note should be F sharp, not G sharp. This is wrong in Beecham’s version and in most editions of the opera. The correction was noted by Delius himself in his own copy of the printed full score and has been corrected in the Collected Edition score.
Why did Beecham choose such a small orchestra, thus forcing him into making many of the significant changes listed above? He said that he wanted “to bring the work within the scope of smaller orchestras”. His version dates from 1940, and at that time (and for many years afterwards) amateur orchestras in particular might have had problems finding instruments like the contrabassoon and tuba. Also, Beecham would have remembered that Delius had sanctioned the Douglas version, for very similar forces - but surely he would also have been mindful of Delius’s comment: “I do not want this version played when a bigger orchestra is available”. The differences between Beecham’s version and the original are sufficiently marked to lead me (and others) to conclude that a version for larger forces would be better. I recently prepared a new reduced orchestration based on triple woodwind and four horns, which restores the bass clarinet, contrabassoon and tuba (see Table) and comes much closer to Delius’s original scoring. My version has a total of 23 wind and brass, which eliminates the problems with the Beecham version listed above, yet falls within the scope of a normal ‘full’ symphony orchestra. So many works are scored for what is virtually a ‘standard’ large orchestra based on triple wind plus 4 horns that (unlike Delius’s original version) programming my version will not mean that extra players have to be found. Even amateur orchestras can usually muster these forces, and my version has been played a number of times by amateur societies. I recently learned that another ‘triple wind plus 4 horns’ version which also restores the important missing instruments has been prepared by David Lloyd-Jones, and it will be made available for hire from Boosey & Hawkes.

Delius’s interests are, of course, going to be served best by using his original scoring for *The Walk*, but for practical and cost reasons this is not going to happen very often these days. It may seem presumptuous to criticise Beecham’s orchestration, but he was forced into many of the changes he made by the small size of the orchestra he chose – and he had his reasons for this. Remembering again Delius’s edict on the Keith Douglas version (“I do not want this version played when a bigger orchestra is available”) we might imagine that Delius himself would have sanctioned a ‘triple wind plus 4 horns’ version as an acceptable compromise for today.

I am very grateful to Robert Threlfall for his invaluable help in writing this article.

** In his encyclopaedic book *Anatomy of the Orchestra* Norman Del Mar says: “...top E is normally regarded as the upper limit......Yet these high cor anglais notes are
often thought to be unmanageable and better given over to the oboe. Beecham, when preparing his edition of *The Walk to the Paradise Garden* transcribed the opening cor anglais solo for oboe (even though it goes no higher than D), but the poignancy of the original, which is awkward but not exorbitantly difficult, is unforgettable.”

© Tony Summers 2008

*A Village Romeo and Juliet: The Paradise Garden*
(Set design by Karl Walser for the 1907 Berlin production)
(Swiss Theatre Collection, Berne)
In July 2005, I bought a copy of Clare Delius’s book *Frederick Delius: Memories of My Brother* – for quite a low price, due to the fact that the hinge was cracked. When I received it, to my delight it was inscribed thus:

“To M. Hollingsworth with much appreciation. Martha B. Richmond”

Of course, Mrs. Richmond is the person who purchased the property where the Delius House was located. She subsequently had the house moved to the campus of Jacksonville University for restoration, and also gave the property to the University.

Pasted on the flyleaf are two black and white photographs of Solano Grove, with captions apparently in Mrs. Richmond’s hand. According to Jeff Driggers,
the photo of the unrestored Delius House is previously unpublished, and it was probably taken in 1939. This angle is unusual, because you can actually see the old cookhouse in back of the main house. The cookhouse was not preserved when the house was moved to the campus of Jacksonville University.

Also inserted in the book is a portion of an old Florida road map with the location of Solano Grove marked with an arrow in black pen. [See last page]. I don’t know the date of the map, because the copyright date is cut off, but it looks like something from the 1940’s. The view toward the St. Johns from the verandah, with the large tree appeared in Beecham’s biography.

I am donating the book with the rare photos and the road map to the Delius Collection at the Haydon Burns Public Library in Jacksonville.

Here are links to a large scan of the flyleaf and the road map:
Scan of flyleaf:
Scan of old road map:
http://thompsonian.info/Solano-Grove-old-road-map.jpg

Bill Thompson

e-mail address: mailto:bill@thompsonian.info
website: http://thompsonian.info/delius.html

The garden at 94 Rue Wilson
(Photo: Jean Merle d’Aubigné)
DELIUS’S EVENING CANTICLES

Trevor Hold dragged from oblivion some music you will not know

[Trevor Hold (1939-2004) was a composer, lecturer and writer – best known, perhaps, for his songs and Parry to Finzi: 20 English Song Composers. This piece was submitted by a distinguished member of the Society who, for obvious reasons, thinks that he should remain anonymous.]

It is not known when Delius wrote his Evening Canticles or the circumstance of their composition. Some scholars suggest that they date from his student days in Leipzig when he was overcome by intense nostalgia for evensong at his local parish church in Bradford. Others say that they are a late work – indeed his very last – written in a fit of intense remorse after he’d been scoffing at Eric Fenby’s religious allegiances. His wife, Jelka, who acted as his amanuensis, had great difficulty stifling rumours of a deathbed conversion to the C of E.

Whatever the facts, the music is difficult to place in Delius’s oeuvre, being his only example of liturgical music. Yet in a strange way the canticles are entirely typical of his composer. The Magnificat opens with a long organ prelude, starting pianissimo and building to a magnificent climax – ‘much like a sunrise’, as one critic has said. The baritone soloist then enters with the opening words, “My soul doth magnify the Lord”, a passage which could come straight out of Sea Drift. Indeed it has, but none the worst for that.

Delius was clearly moved by the text, as is demonstrated by the religious fervour he gives to the phrase, “Call me blessed” and the forthright vigour of his fugal writing at the words, “He hath put down”. At the phrase, “And the rich he hath sent empty away”, the music itself drifts away to nothing, with the semichorus echoing the final word, “Away…away…away…” into the distance. With the Nunc Dimittis we are in more familiar Delius territory, though many will feel that the ‘cuckoo’ motive which dominates the movement is somewhat out-of-place. The alto soloist sings the text over a gently undulating accompaniment from the chorus, singing wordlessly to “Ah”. As she finishes, the chorus gradually takes over, swelling in and out in an sequence of exquisite chromatic chords until we are brought back to earth again with the Gloria.

The final 8-part “Amen” is one of the highpoints of English choral-writing, worthy to stand beside Byrd, Purcell and Parry.

© 2000 Trevor Hold
From: Roger Buckley

In my review of the recital of songs by Delius recorded for Hyperion by Yvonne Kenny and Piers Lane (DSJ 142, Autumn 2007, pp 140-2)) I referred to the mystery surrounding the supposed Heine setting, *Aus dienen Augen fliessen meine Leider*. Describing it as “a truly lovely song”, I unfortunately concluded that “the ear confirms that this is indeed a Delian composition”.

Mark Stone, in the course of his research into two songs (DSJ 143, Spring 2008, pp 123-6), discovered that *Aus dienen Augen fliessen meine Leider* is in fact a setting by Franz Ries of words by Dorothea Böttcher von Schwerin, published in an album dated 1888, though possibly composed some 12 years earlier. Presumably it was the finding of this song (albeit in an unidentified hand) among the manuscripts preserved by Jelka that persuaded Sir Thomas Beecham to regard it as one of Delius’s compositions.

I stand by my initial judgment: *Aus dienen Augen fliessen meine Leider* is a lovely song. However, it was not composed by Delius. The finding of a copy among his papers has yet to be explained; perhaps it had been a favourite of the young composer at the outset of his career.

As to my own conclusion: I was quite wrong! I apologise to readers of the *Journal* for having added confusion to an existing mystery – something that no true scholar would ever do – and I congratulate Mark Stone on his careful research.

From: Tony Summers

Paris: *A different side to Delius*

Congratulations on a wonderful series of articles on *Paris!* I would like to add something that brings together this Delius work with a comment made by Julian Lloyd-Webber during his conversation with Paul Guinery about orchestral musicians being bored by Delius.

Twenty-eight years ago I took part in what was then a very rare amateur orchestra performance of *Paris*. Apart from the conductor, John Lubbock, I was the only member of the orchestra who had ever heard the work. Before we started rehearsing there were the usual moans from the players about how,
being Delius, this was going to be such a boring rehearsal. But by the end it was a different story. People were amazed and very pleasantly surprised by what they had encountered – brought up on a diet of The First Cuckoo and The Walk to the Paradise Garden, they imagined that Delius only wrote dreamy, sentimental music which, if you don’t like it, is not very interesting to play.

This impression of Delius is unfortunately still only too prevalent today. We should do everything possible to encourage performances of works that show the vigorous, energetic side to Delius and restore the balance. People would realise that there is so much more to this composer if only they had the chance to hear the true breadth of his style. Hats off, then, to conductors like Darryl Davison who has performed Paris with amateur orchestras several times in recent years. Let’s hope that more conductors with an interest in Delius will look beyond the old favourites: we need more performances of works like Paris, Lebenstanz, Eventyr, North Country Sketches and Appalachia to give a truer picture of what Delius was really capable.

The last chord of Paris

I would like to expand on a point Paul Guinery makes in his illuminating article in DSJ 143 on the structure of Paris. He says that the work ends with “a strong tutti G major chord but with an E natural hinting ambiguously at the relative minor.” Personally, this is not what I hear. To me, the final chord is G major (with a strong G in the bass), plus the added major sixth (E): it is thus an ‘added sixth’ chord and I think any jazz musician hearing Paris would say that it ends on a chord of ‘G6’. As Deryck Cooke remarks in his book The Language of Music, major triads tend to strike a ‘contentedly joyful note’ and this is further enhanced when combined with a major sixth to give the uplifting and pleasurable added sixth. If the brass is properly balanced I am not convinced that there is much sense of E minor in this chord. The uplifting, ‘added sixth’ feeling is enhanced by the build up to the final climax, on horns, with a crescendo on close-harmony G6 chords, an effect sounding considerably more modern than one would expect for a work written in 1899.

Works ending on an added sixth have become a cliché in jazz and popular music, but at the time of Paris it was very unusual to conclude a piece in this way; in fact Paris may well be the first orchestral work to end on an added sixth chord. Delius ended a number of other works on added sixth chords, and its use by other composers to conclude works is fairly rare outside popular music – but Berg’s Violin Concerto is a well-known example of that.
Delius makes so much use of the added sixth chord that it is interesting to speculate as to why he was so fascinated by it. Added sixth harmony features widely in American popular music in the later 19th century, and a major sixth chord is obtained when the top four open strings of the guitar are struck. Delius almost certainly heard plenty of music using this chord in his Florida days and it was one of the many ‘american’ musical influences to creep into his music, just as it crept into the first stirrings of jazz a decade or so later in New Orleans.

From: Tony Watts

It’s always interesting to come upon a reference to Delius in an unexpected place. I’ve been reading Poetry and Mysticism by Colin Wilson (Hutchinson, 1970). In a chapter devoted to Rupert Brooke, Wilson makes this observation: “Fashions come and go. Nowadays we are able to listen to Delius without worrying that he was apparently unaware of the existence of Schoenberg and Stravinsky.” A good point, though slightly misleading: Delius was well aware of Schoenberg and Stravinsky but, luckily for us, saw no good reason to emulate them.

From: Rob Sabine

Rudolf Kempe

The recent and long-awaited issue of Reginald Goodall’s legendary performance of The Mastersingers on CD put me in mind of the Delius Centenary Festival at Bradford in 1962, conducted by Rudolf Kempe – a distinguished conductor, but not at the time associated with the music of Delius. As Society Members well know, Beecham had invited him to become associate conductor of the RPO – which offer he had accepted. He wasn’t to realise the extent of his commitment until Beecham became ill and died in March 1961, leaving him with the responsibility of conducting the Centenary concerts.

Although the RPO were no strangers to the music of Delius, Beecham being the composer’s greatest advocate, there was a feeling among the orchestra that without him a week of Delius was something to be approached with apprehension. In fact, Kempe inspired the orchestra both as a conductor and as a man. The Centenary Festival was a success.
At the time, I had just been ‘demobbed’ from the RAF, waiting to go on to higher education. I had a cursory acquaintance with the music of Delius through a long-playing record – Ace of Clubs, which was the first of the cheap label releases – but I had purchased it, not for Delius, but for Vaughan Williams’s *Thomas Tallis Fantasia*. The Delius was the ‘flip-side’ – traditionally on gramophone records the ‘runner-up’, the side you didn’t play.

These were Anthony Collins’s recordings of some of the best-known pieces, and when I did actually play it, I was stunned by the music, its beauty and individuality - a feeling that remains to this day.

I remember listening to the Centenary Concerts on the Third Programme, and what a wealth of material – *Sea Drift*, the *Violin Concerto*, *North Country Sketches*, *The Song of the High Hills*, *Songs of Sunset*, *Songs of Farewell*, etc. Why was there no performance of *A Mass of Life*?

There are still Members of the Society who attended the Centenary concerts, and the Society was formed soon afterwards. The release of Goodall’s *The Mastersingers*, and the impressive issue of BBC recordings on the BBC Legends label leads me to suggest that the BBC recordings of Kempe’s Delius recordings – which presumably still exist – or at least a selection of them, should be issued. Does anyone in the Society have knowledge of these recordings – and is anyone able to approach the BBC on the Society’s behalf? A tantalising thought.
Roger Buckley welcomed an enthusiastic audience to the first London Branch meeting of the 2008–09 Season. Reminding us that this was our 46th year, he outlined plans for an interesting and varied winter programme of musical events, and then welcomed Michael Green.

Prior to his talk, Mike distributed a helpful list of forty works by a wide range of composers who, since 1831, had featured the human voice used wordlessly to augment and enrich their orchestration; eight of these were by Delius. He reminded us that during his most creative period, Delius regularly employed a wordless chorus - the finest examples of which were to be found in the First Dance Song from A Mass of Life and in The Song of the High Hills – and thought that it would be interesting to consider just how much Delius had been influenced by any earlier works by other composers. Conversely, had any of Delius’s music influenced others?

It is known that he admired the work of both Berlioz and Bizet. During the evening we heard appropriate extracts from Berlioz’s Marche Funèbre pour la dernière scene d’Hamlet, Bizet’s L’Arlésienne, Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker, Massenet’s Thaïs, Debussy’s Sirènes from Nocturnes, and Puccini’s Madam Butterfly. Whether Delius had been present at performances of any of these compositions has never been recorded, for very little is known of his concert going during the Paris years.

We heard examples from all Delius’s works using a wordless chorus, The Magic Fountain, Koanga, Hassan, Appalachia, A Mass of Life, The Song of the High Hills, Fennimore & Gerda, and the unaccompanied partsong To be Sung of a Summer Night on the River.

During this most rewarding evening, Mike enlarged on his theme by playing us further examples from other composers’ works, including Hoist’s Savitri, Ravel’s Daphnis & Chloe and Vaughan Williams’s Flos Campi. On a
purely personal note and as an ex-serviceman of many years, I find this last piece, with all its Great War connotations, particularly moving.

What we did know was that much of Delius’s work was strongly influenced by his early experiences at Solano Grove in Florida, where he listened to the sounds of his negro employees harmonizing their traditional work songs – their music drifting across the St Johns River. Similarly, his walks in the peace and rugged grandeur of the Norwegian high hills much affected his musical thinking.

Mike concluded that, although Delius had made substantial use of voices without words, even after listening to all those examples, it was not possible to say for certain how great an influence that may have had on other composers. There is no doubt that he was an original and unique composer who went his own way, and it seemed that he was unlikely to have been very much influenced by anyone else either.

Martin Lee-Browne thanked Michael Green for a very scholarly and meticulously researched talk on a quite individual and fascinating subject - it made a most entertaining evening.

© Anthony Lindsey 2008

It is interesting to see the relative frequency with which great names appear in these pages; indeed, it is highly instructive, for The Gramophone is in a way a key to the state of musical culture in new world of gramophonism. Bach beats Handel by 12, their respective number of references being 64 and 52. Haydn receives only 32 references, Schumann 35, and Mendelssohn 45. Gounod, I am happy to see, receives no more than Schumann, and Liszt has but 21. There are 39 for Grieg and 31 for Franck (this last is splendid!). Delius, to our (only temporary) disgrace, has 7, but Debussy has 44. Vaughan Williams surpasses Elgar – 37 to 34, and Holst does not do badly with 19. There are 57 for Brahms, 79 for Strauss, and 81 for Verdi. The delightful Schubert runs to 88. Beethoven, the great master, is mentioned 132 times, and Wagner 181. Pride of place is fittingly held by Mozart, with 218. This is magnificent, even allowing for the fact that Mozart’s music comes better from the gramophone than any other.

Sydney Grew in The Gramophone, August 1926
HITCHCOCK’S MUSIC
Jack Sullivan

One of the interesting aspects of Delius’s life and work is his impact on creative artists younger than himself. One such artist, working in a different medium from Delius, was the film-maker Alfred Hitchcock. I remember very well the first time I saw Hitchcock’s film *Saboteur*, in which one character who happens to be blind mentions Delius and plays some of his music to the main character of the film – I was fascinated by the music and its creator. As Professor Jack Sullivan says in this new study of the music Hitchcock used in his films, for Hitchcock “.... music is a path into healing and truth.” Delius’s music was used there to illuminate and underline the need for trust in the struggle against evil which is depicted in the film.

Sullivan aims to show that we cannot fully understand Hitchcock’s films without understanding the music used in them. For Hitchcock, music is an alternative language which illuminates his characters’ thoughts and emotions. In some of the most important of his films, music is a significant part of the narrative. This book helps us look at his career from another point of view, where we listen to, as well as watch, his remarkable films for their musical achievements. Our particular interest will be in what Sullivan has to say about Delius and a number of other English and Australian composers.

It is almost 70 years since Eric Fenby wrote the film music for *Jamaica Inn*, a film which Hitchcock did not enjoy making – he had actually tried to get out of his contract to produce it. Sullivan has a high regard for what there is of
Eric Fenby’s score, although the film was clearly not one of Hitchcock’s finest achievements.

In a chapter about the earliest Hitchcock films, Sullivan mentions that the film-maker shared Constant Lambert’s view of the “intoxicating melancholy” of jazz, and that Hitchcock employed the Australian, Arthur Benjamin – a friend of Eric Fenby – to write music for The Man Who Knew Too Much. It is not, however, explained how Hitchcock came to know Benjamin, or if the commission came via Eric Fenby.

In 1920 Alfred Hitchcock saw J. M Barrie’s play Mary Rose, which had incidental music by Norman O’Neill, in a production at The Haymarket Theatre in London – and when he was making Rebecca he wanted to incorporate some of that music into Franz Waxman’s score for this great film. Sadly, however, that never happened; Sullivan tells us that his hunt for the Mary Rose score became a lifelong obsession for Hitchcock, and that he never fully succeeded in recapturing the full impact of O’Neill’s score.

We are told that some of the music for Vertigo has a “Delian longing”, and that Delius spent his whole musical life trying to recapture a single moment of his youth in the Florida marshes. This is an exaggeration of only one aspect of Delius’s music, although we must admit that Delius could, when he wanted to, powerfully conjure up a desire for long-lost emotions or events. Professor Sullivan explains Hitchcock’s approach to music, and how he changed the way we understand all film music; he believes that Hitchcock’s response to Delius is an interesting aspect of this development. This is a very approachable overview of the music in Hitchcock’s films which will be attractive to the general reader.

© Paul Chennell 2008
SONATA IN B & SONATA No 3
Susanna Candlin & Oliver Davies
The Steinway Hall, Marylebone Lane, London on 19 March 2008

Those who found themselves able to support this concert – the attendance, although adequate, was disappointing – missed an excellent evening. The performers, and those hard-working people who organised both the programme and the refreshments, should be congratulated on producing a very special event. Although the Steinway Hall has a bizzare layout, it has the double advantage of being intimate and having a very satifying acoustic. The performances filled it with glorious music: Susanna Candlin played with obvious enjoyment, a rich tone and faultless intonation – while Oliver Davies provided, by turns, sensitive and idiomatic accompaniment and some powerfully played solo passages when required. Any deeper, technical, analysis of the playing this reviewer is not qualified to provide – but what mattered most, it seemed to me, was the communicated enjoyment. Nevertheless......

Sinding’s Romance proved to be a charming morsel, nicely played. By comparison, Delius’s 1892 Sonata, this reviewer’s favourite, is a big, challenging, passionate, youthful piece; it was powerfully played, and the performers swept that audience along with them. In contrast, the 1923 Sonata (No.3) is not one of his more convincing works, but it had everything done for it that the performers possibly could. It was, in truth, overshadowed by Grieg’s 1887 Sonata, a red-bloodied and dramatic masterpiece, energetic and poetic by turns. In this, the artists excelled themselves – perhaps they have played it more than the Delius Sonatas – and well deserved the enthusiastic applause they received.

They should be signed up to return next season to play the other two Sonatas. The Society has ample funds, and should not hesitate to finance live music of this quality. The money left on deposit is of little relevance to the membership. And please may a cellist be found for the following season!

Ian Walker
BRIGG FAIR
St Giles’ Orchestra
St Andrews Church, Oxford on 12 April 2008

I have had occasion to praise the work of the ‘pro/am’ orchestras before, and I am very glad to be able to do so again. The St Giles Orchestra in Oxford has a really valuable asset in its conductor Geoffrey Bushell. Not only does he (with the Orchestra’s approval) include an interesting but unplayed, and sometimes quite unknown, work in virtually every concert – for example both its two previous concerts included concertos by Max Bruch! - but he also has a real gift for getting the players ‘inside’ the music, and to understand what any particular piece of Elgar or Delius, for example, or a part of a piece, is ‘about’.

The main difficulty which afflicts virtually every pro/am orchestra is tuning – and if the tuning-up before the music begins is not really accurate, all sorts of curious sounds will emerge along the way. Regrettably that was the case at this concert, but it was nevertheless an extremely enjoyable one, because everyone was going in the right direction. The other ‘down’ was a couple of those unfortunate spells of ‘collective panic’ that sometimes strike pro/am performances; happily, however, they righted themselves quite quickly.

In many ways, the colossal first and last sections of Elgar’s In the South are the most extrovert music that Elgar ever wrote – and there was real excitement and a sense of forward movement in the surging opening tune that goes up three octaves. The wistfulness of the first quiet section was well caught, the big ‘Rome’ bit was suitably imposing, and in the calm centre section, the viola solo was sensitively played – the moonlight on the sea, the warmth of an Italian night and the gently rocking boats beautifully evoked. Then the sense of excitement and urgency returned, and the elan of the final pages, crescendoing upwards and upwards, was authentic Elgar playing. The acoustics of the church, however, made it difficult for the brief pauses and the off-beat entries to tell as they would in a good hall.

In Brigg Fair, the hazy opening and the theme (taken a little more slowly than usual) were lovely, the latter sounding very much as Joseph Taylor might have sung it. The Lento variation in the middle was excellent – well balanced, with some sweet violin tone, and a well-played horn solo; the ‘march’ variation was not actually very solemn, or as maestoso as it could have been – and as the music quickened up towards the big climax, the prominent violin accompaniment to the tune (which then gets taken over by the clarinet) did lack that rhapsodic Delian feel. The flow of one variation into the next was, however, very well managed, and there was never any feeling of mentally
stopping to adjust to the new tempo and atmosphere. The acoustics, again, did not help, and quite a number of prominent inner parts failed to come through the texture – but that was not, of course, the fault of the conductor or orchestra. To sum up – it may not have been echt-Delius, but it was nevertheless very enterprising programming, and they made a very good shot at it.

The final work in the concert was the Dvořák Cello Concerto, with William Bass as the soloist. He was very good in the quiet music – a warm, sweet tone, and both the famous second subject of the first movement (initially played by the first horn) and the end of the whole work were beautiful; in the extrovert parts, however, he was less convincing.

Throughout the concert, the Orchestra – who are all amateurs or music teachers in local schools – obviously enjoyed themselves, and that certainly communicated itself to the quite sizeable audience.

ML-B

LEGENDE, SONATA NO. 2 – Philippe Graffin & Marisa Gupta
English Music Festival at Dorchester-on-Thames – Radley College Silk Hall 27 May 2008

The French violinist Philippe Graffin has already made something of a name for himself in relation to English music, for he has recorded both the Coleridge-Taylor and Elgar Concertos – and here he showed an innate sympathy with Delius’s music.

The Legende, which dates from 1892, is, of course, almost salon-type music; the opening is not very Delian – and there’s even one point where there is a grace note in the piano part! Here, the opening was warm & flowing, with a fine work-up to the first very passionate climax. In the slow section, Graffin’s sustained top G# was exquisite – and the final Vivo was feather-like.

Likewise, the beginning of the Sonata was warm and flowing. Marisa Gupta was a very assured accompanist – although the piano part is not much to write home about; it is simply an accompaniment, so the piece is not a real duo. The first section flowed effortlessly; the slow, quiet, bits were most peaceful and affecting, with very subtle rubato, and they never ground to a halt; the ‘dum-di-dum’ bit in the middle, and the two Molto vivaces towards the end were full of life. Philippe Graffin certainly knew where he was going, and his accompanist went with him willingly. A good recital.      ML-B
[This time, Miscellany is largely concerned with broadcasts of, or related to, Delius’s music – which cannot possibly be a bad thing, and they should certainly should be recorded in this Journal. The ‘hero’ is Classic FM, who deserve our congratulations for the regular inclusion of Delius in their programmes - and long may they continue to support the cause. The not-hero is…….who?]

Radio 4 dumbs down yet again…..

One of the specialist subjects that the contestants had to choose from in a round of the music quiz “Counterpoint”, broadcast twice in May, was “Walton and Delius” (in that order!). Five of the eight questions were about Walton, though one of them did at least mention Fred - Delius was born in Bradford, where was Walton born? The eventual winner chose this, and got all the Delius questions right:

- Which work is subtitled Variations on an old slave song?
- Which work (that had to be recognized from hearing the opening bars) was based on which work by Nietzsche?
- For which play by Flecker did Delius write incidental music?

As a “Counterpoint” old boy (a losing finalist from the early years of the show, in the 1980s), I don’t think that they would have defeated me!

Peter Ratcliffe

But Classic FM comes to the rescue…..

On 12 July, Classic FM broadcast Myer Fredman’s recording of Paris with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, and five days later Richard Hickox’s In a Summer Garden with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra! Then, on 10 August, their programme If you liked that, you’ll like this, introduced by David Mellor (the former Minister for Culture) was entirely devoted to Delius, except for the item (an odd bedfellow or curiously apt, depending on your point of view) by Jeremiah Clarke which started it off – The Prince of Denmark’s March. There were, of course, the ‘usual’ pieces, but there were also excerpts from the Piano and Cello Concertos, and from Appalachia.
The BBC then picks itself up......

On 29 July, Radio 4 put out a half-hour programme (one of three called *Page to Performance*), about which the *Radio Times* said “Delius’s Cuckoo: Frederick Delius’s *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* is loved for its quintessential Englishness, despite deriving its tune from a Norwegian folk-song, and being composed in France by a man of German parentage. Lowri Blake unravels this six-minute masterpiece, talking to conductor David Lloyd Jones, composer Anthony Payne and members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.”

Lollipops, anyone?

Any Members who would like many of the smaller pieces grouped together on one CD could do much worse than invest a fiver on Naxos’s compilation *The Best of Delius*. It includes *The Cuckoo* and *Summer Night on the River*; the *Irmelin Prelude* and the *Two Aquarelles*; “Scherzo” (presumably from the *Suite d’Orchestre*) and *Fantastic Dance; The Walk, Sleigh Ride, Idylle de Printemps, La Calinda* and the Closing Scene from *Koanga*. The orchestras include the RSNO, English Northern Philharmonia and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, with Myer Fredman and David Lloyd-Jones (the Chairman of the Delius Trust) among the conductors. The number is 8.556837.

In a Summer Garden

The arrangement of this work for piano two-hands by Philip Heseltine was very much admired by Delius himself. It was not, in fact, published until 1982, but has nevertheless not been available for some time. However, arrangements have recently been made with the original publishers, Universal Edition (London) of 48 Great Marlborough Street, London W1 7BB, who will supply photocopies to order. Applications can be made to them on 0207-439-6678 or at uelondon@universaledition.com

(Courtesy of Robert Threlfall)
Did Delius ever go to the Costa del Sol?

The August 2008 issue of the Classic FM magazine had a cover disc called Summer Serenade, and although its somewhat not-quite-echt-Delian sub-title is Sensual music for Sun-drenched Days, it nevertheless includes three Delius items:

The Walk to the Paradise Garden – RPO & Meredith Davies
Summer Night on the River – Royal Scottish National Orchestra & David Lloyd-Jones
In a Summer Garden – RPO & Sir Thomas Beecham

The Walk is taken from Meredith Davies’s recording of the whole opera and has the original scoring; it’s a lovely performance. Summer Night comes from David Lloyd-Jones’s Naxos recording of 2004, and it sounds very good indeed. In a Summer Garden, which I’m probably not alone in remembering as a 10 inch Columbia LP with Over the Hills and Far Away on the other side, faithfully reproduces all the ‘noises off’ – creaks and groans – plus an awful tape join, but it’s still magical. These three items make up 29 of the disc’s 74 minutes, so Delius is well served.

He’s not quite so well served by the note on page 3 of the magazine, where of The Walk we learn that “Delius scores his work for a huge orchestra, and in this beautiful interlude uses long, song-like melodies in a continuous rhapsodic episode that reveals the composer’s debt to his teacher, Maurice Ravel, in its hazy atmosphere.” Maybe the writer was thinking of RVW……

Paul Chennell

But another writer also got Delius wrong………

On Sunday 24 Aug, in his BBC talk “Vaughan Williams: Valiant for Truth”, Stephen Johnson described RVW’s Pastoral Symphony as “enigmatic music – this is music with another side to it, it isn’t just a great, sort of, Deliusish wallow in the nostalgia and the beauty of the country…” Perhaps he’ll go on to talk about Wagner as a proto-Nazi, Debussy as an Impressionist composer and Elgar as a tub-thumping nationalist, I would hope for more nuanced (and better-informed) comments from a Radio 3 presenter.
The Stanford Society has an interesting-looking Weekend of recitals, talks and concerts to mark the 50th anniversary of Vaughan Williams’s death, on 1 and 2 November 2008, based on St Luke’s Church, Chelsea and the Royal Festival Hall. Full details can be found at www.thestanfordsociety.com

The Delius ‘cello sonata played by Miss Beatrice Harrison and Mr. Harold Craxton is rather beyond my capacity for enjoyment at present. It wanders about over four sides of two discs with what, to the average man, will sound like a good deal of dull repetition. The recording is splendid, and I hope I shall grow to like it. I don’t seem able to extract a sonata from it as yet, and if it isn’t a sonata, why call it one? Poets do not write poems in eight lines and call them sonnets. Nobody wants to deny a composer the liberty of experiment, but why should he put new wine in old bottles? However, I expect that this is a perfectly good sonata all the time and that my own stupidity is to blame for not recognising it as such.

*The Gramophone* August 1926
DELIUS SOCIETY LONDON BRANCH
MEETINGS & OTHER EVENTS 2008/9

All Meetings take place at the Jubilee Room, New Cavendish Club, 44 Great Cumberland Place, London W1H 8BS (unless otherwise stated).

Monday 27 October 2008 at 7.00pm
Royal Academy of Music, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT
The Delius Prize
Adjudicator: Bo Holten
Reception to follow
There is no charge for tickets but they are needed for admission. Members should contact the RAM Box Office: tel: 020 7873 7300; email: box.office@ram.ac.uk

Tuesday 25 November 2008 at 7.15pm
Paul Chennell
Delius at the Proms
This talk will show how the music of Delius has been programmed at the London Promenade Concerts from 1907 to the present day, and how the reception of Delius’s music over the years has been mirrored by the development of the Proms themselves.

Wednesday 21 January 2009 at 7.15pm
Members’ Choices
Following the successful event held by the Midlands Branch in November 2007, members are invited to make a personal choice of a work (or a part of a work) by Delius and, if they so wish, to say a few words about it. If you would like to contribute in this way, please contact the evening’s organiser, Michael Green, on michael.green620@tesco.net or at 5 & 6 Sandy Bank, Bewdley, Worcestershire DY12 2AY

Tuesday 24 February 2009 at 7.15pm
John Lucas
Writing about Sir Thomas
Saturday 21st March 2009 at 7.30pm
Leeds Town Hall, The Headrow, Leeds LS1 3AD (0113-247-79890)
*A Mass of Life*
Joan Rogers, soprano
Jean Rigby, mezzo soprano
Daniel Norman, tenor
James Rutherford, baritone
Leeds Festival and Philharmonic Choirs
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra
David Hill, conductor
This performance will be the highlight of a Delius Society Weekend, which will also include a private tour of Harewood House. Accommodation will be available at the Great Victoria Hotel, Bradford. Full details appeared in a leaflet that was recently mailed to UK members. Further information is available from Roger Buckley, on RJBuckley@aol.com or at 8 Glisson Road, Cambridge CB1 2HD

Thursday 21st May 2009 at 7.30pm
Royal Festival Hall, London SE1 8XX; Box Office (0871-663-2500)
*A Mass of Life*
Susan Bullock, soprano
Susan Bickley, mezzo soprano
Nigel Robson, tenor
Alan Opie, baritone
Bach Choir
Philharmonia Orchestra
David Hill, conductor
N.B. Unless otherwise stated, all Meetings of the London Branch take place at the Jubilee Room, New Cavendish Club, 44 Great Cumberland Place, London W1H 8BS (0207-723-0391)

26 – 30 May 2008
BBC Radio 3 – Delius was the subject of Donald Macleod’s ‘Composer of the Week’ programme:

Monday 26 May 2008
Of Everywhere and Nowhere: An exploration of early compositional influences of Delius:
*Zum Carnival*
*Now Once in a Way we are Free for a Day (Koanga)*
*Summer Evening*
*In the Garden of the Seraglio, Silken Shoes & Irmelin Rose* (Felicity Lott)
*Piano Concerto (revised version)* (Piers Lane & RLPO)

Tuesday 27 May
Delius & Grieg:
*Sleigh Ride*
Grieg: *In Ola Valley*
*First Cuckoo*
*On Craig Dhu*
Delius (arr. Warlock): *In a Summer Garden*
*Life’s Dance*

Wednesday 28 May
Delius & Grainger:
Trad: *Brigg Fair* (Joseph Taylor voice)
Trad. arr Grainger: *Brigg Fair*
*Brigg Fair*
*The Streamlet’s Slumber Song*
*Hassan* (Act 2)
*Dance Rhapsody No 1*
Thursday 29 May
Delius & Beecham:
*Prelude: Irmelin*
*Wanderer’s Song*
*At Night (Florida Suite)*
*North Country Sketches No 4 (arr. Warlock)*
*A Village Romeo & Juliet (Scene 5)*

Friday 30 May
Delius & Fenby:
*Prelude No 2*
*Caprice*
*A Song of Summer*
*Violin Sonata, Op Posth*
*Requiem: The snow lingers yet on the mountains*

Saturday 9 August 2008
Kings College Chapel, Cambridge
English Voices cond. Dr Timothy Brown
Programme included Delius, Byrd, Allegri

Wednesday 10 September 2008 at 7.15
LONDON BRANCH
‘Songs without Words’ - the contribution of Delius to the instrumental use of voices
- a talk by Michael Green

21 & 31 October 2008
New York City Center, USA
American Ballet Theatre
Anthony Tudor Centennial Celebration
*Romeo & Juliet (The Walk to the Paradise Garden)* with (21 October)
Tchaikovsky/Balanchine & a premiere, and (31 October) all-Tudor programme: Pachelbel, Chausson, Weill and Schoenberg
Monday 27 October 2008 at 7.00  
Royal Academy of Music, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT  
The Delius Prize  
Adjudicator: Bo Holten  
Followed by a Reception

Tuesday 25 November 2008 at 7.15pm  
LONDON BRANCH  
*Delius at the Proms* – a talk by Paul Chennell (See Page 153 above)

Wednesday 21st January 2009 at 7.15  
LONDON BRANCH  
Members’ Choices (See Page 153 above)

Saturday 31 January 2009 at 7.45  
High Cross Church, Knoll Road, Camberley (0252-878053)  
Farnborough Symphony Orchestra cond. Mark Fitzgerald  
*A Song before Sunrise*, plus Rossini, Bach, Handel & Bizet

Tuesday 24 February 2009 at 7.15  
LONDON BRANCH  
*Writing about Sir Thomas* – a talk by John Lucas (See Page 153 above)

Saturday 21 March 2009  
Leeds Town Hall  
Joan Rogers, Jean Rigby, Daniel Norman, James Rutherford,  
Leeds Festival & Philharmonic Choruses & BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. David Hill  
*A Mass of Life*  
(See Page 154 above)

Thursday 21 May 2009  
Royal Festival Hall  
The Bach Choir, Philharmonia Orchestra, Susan Bullock, Susan Bickley, Nigel Robson & Alan Opie, cond. David Hill  
*A Mass of Life*  
(See Page 154 above)
Map of Jacksonville area (c.1940)
(Haydon Burns Public Library, Jacksonville)