

DELIOUS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER
of the
DELIUS SOCIETY

President: Eric Fenby, O.B.E.
Hon. Secretary: Miss Estelle Palmley.
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Editor: John White.

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Christmas, 1970.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, 14th January, 1971. Society Meeting. Talk by Brude Boyce. Holborn Library, 7.30p.m. (to be preceded by a special meeting, commencing at 6.45p.m. to discuss proposed changes in the structure of the present Committee).

Tuesday, 16th February, 1971. "A Mass of Life". London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir conducted by Charles Groves with Heather Harper, Helen Watts, Ryland Davies and Thomas Hemsley. Royal Festival Hall.
Seats: 9/-(45p); 14/-(70p); 18/-(90p); 22/-(£1.10p); 26/-(1.30p); 30/-(£1.50).

Monday, 8th March, 1971. "Paris". Charles Groves conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Royal Festival Hall.

Thursday, 18th March, 1971.)
Sunday, 21st March, 1971.) "Brigg Fair"

Vernon Handley conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. Royal Festival Hall.

Thursday, 25th March, 1971. Society Meeting. A talk on Walt Whitman by Dawn Redwood. Holborn Library, 7.30 p.m.

Sunday, 9th May, 1971. 7.30 p.m. Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, at the Philharmonic Hall. Song recital by Joan Sutherland accompanied by Richard Bonynges, which includes Heimkehr and Abendstimmung; also two songs by Grieg.
Seats: 35s(175p); 30s.(150p); 25/-(125p); 20s(100p); 15s(75p).
Booking opening dates: Society, Choir and Club Members, 4th Jan. General Public, 11th Jan.

EDITORIAL

The greater part of this Newsletter is devoted to "A Mass of Life"; this is appropriate since, as mentioned in the last issue, the Beecham recording has now been re-issued and at a bargain price, and we are to have another live performance at the Royal Festival Hall in February next. Geoffrey Crankshaw's review, in 'Records and Recording', is reproduced in full, followed by press notices of the live Liverpool performance of a year ago, included because the conductor - Charles Groves - is in charge of the concert in February. (These cuttings were made available to me by Mr. Lovgren; to whom I am most grateful). The section is concluded by the text of a "Profile" of Charles Groves, broadcast by the B.B.C. in "Music Magazine" on the 28th June, which contains several references to his work on behalf of Delius.

It is sad that the projected performances of "Lebenstanz" by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, mentioned in the last Newsletter, will not now take place. However, another of the earlier works, the opera "Koanga", is being revived in the United States and I eagerly await details of this important and interesting event from our American friends. In the meantime, I reproduce a cutting from the "Washington Post" which was sent in by Mr. Richard Foose.

The issue concludes with another inimitable Midlands' Report. Enthusiasm for Delius seems to have a salutary effect on the thirsts (and appetites) of our Midlands' members; perhaps this is a tradition which stems from the first performance of the "Florida Suite". Anyway, Delius would have approved, undoubtedly.

The October, 1970 issue of 'Music and Letters' contains an article by our member, Christopher Palmer, entitled "Delius and Poetic Realism". Mr. Palmer discusses the work of the German writers Adalbert Stifter, Theodor Storm and Gottfried Keller; it will be remembered that it was the latter's story "Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe" that formed the basis of Delius' fifth opera, also considered at some length in the article. The concluding section deals with Jacobsen and the works he inspired: "Fennimore and Gerda" and "An Arabesque".

This article is an important contribution to our understanding of the two last operas in particular and you are urged to read it if possible. Copies, price 10/6d. are obtainable from Music and Letters Ltd. (Oxford University Press), 44 Conduit Street, London W.1.

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All queries, correspondence and contributions in connection with the Newsletter should be sent to the Editor at the following address:
19 Maple Avenue, Maidstone, Kent.

A MASS OF LIFE

Rosina Raisbeck (soprano), Monica Sinclair (contralto), Charles Craig (tenor), Bruce Boyce (baritone), London Philharmonic Choir, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Sir Thomas Beecham. CBS Classics 61182-83 (mono).

How marvellous to have this great recording available again. Of course, Delius' "Mass of Life" is one of his noblest achievements. Nietzsche's pantheistic humanism held the composer in thrall, indeed one could say that musician and poet have rarely been so fundamentally attuned. To set this closely reasoned text to vital music would have appeared an insuperable task - until Delius achieved it. The result is a union of poetic and musical imagery of unsurpassed intensity of communication. Never shall I forget the transcendent thrill of hearing this work performed by Sir Thomas at the old Queens Hall in the superb Delius Festival of 1929, with the frail figure of the composer, in his wheeled chair in the circle.

The blazing conviction and immaculate musicianship of Beecham's interpretation is sheer genius. I shall not attempt to analyse this genius; just let me draw attention to the torrential drive of the mighty opening chorus, the rhythmic vitality of the third movement, and the profound poetic insight of the Andante molto tranquillo section which concludes Part 1 of the work. Here the infinite fluency and inner strength of Sir Thomas' phrasing drive direct to the heart of Delius' vision.

The orchestral introduction to Part 2 provides further proof of this work's status as the central pillar of the composer's artistic achievement. The secret power and evocative perspectives of those horn calls, rising ever higher, then falling again - this is not the music of the wayward dreamer which some would have Delius to be; there is here epitomised the spirit of an age - one in which beauty was on the retreat before destructive forces. Delius saw it - and captured the fleeting glory before the deluge. Sir Thomas saw it too; his was the art of beauty. No conductor has ever conjured playing and singing so saturated with the quivering sensuousness of living, palpable sound. Listen to the magic of the Lento molto movement at the start of side 3. Where can you hear such richness to-day? Observe the gradual injection of passion - so subtle in its growth that music and life can be seen to be interchangeable terms - which is the central glory, the timeless message of this work. It is a hymn to Life.

Inspired by Sir Thomas' unchallengeable mastery all the performers give memorably to the total triumph. Bruce Boyce's warm, firmly chiselled singing is particularly appealing, but Monica Sinclair, Charles Craig and Rosina Raisbeck all show that they have the root of the matter - this is not the music for histrionics, but for total dedication to poetic communication. This we get. The extremely difficult choral writing is gloriously mastered by Frederick Jackson's London Philharmonic Choir. Energy surges in the many moments of uninhibited release, but Delius' matchless quietude is honoured with equal fidelity. As for the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra,

their grasp of style and mellow tonal glow are unforgettable. This is a reissue of extreme importance. The mono recording naturally has less than the ideal perspectives to which modern techniques have accustomed us, but it is none the less an outstanding technical achievement. Buy this set even if you have to sell matches on the Embankment as a result.

GEOFFREY CRANKSHAW.

(from "Records and Recordings" - October, 1970)

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Daily Telegraph, 19th January, 1970.

MUSIC IN THE NORTH - DELIUS' "MASS OF LIFE"

An important feature of Northern musical life in recent years has been the attention given by Charles Groves to some of the neglected British works of the first part of the century, one of our richest creative periods.....

Perhaps his most important achievement was his resurrection of Delius' "Requiem" which had been totally overlooked since its first performance in 1920 and which he revealed as a major work.

To-morrow, he turns his attention to Delius' "A Mass of Life". This large-scale work can hardly be said to be overplayed, although it is by no means unknown, thanks to Beecham's no longer very adequate recording. Public performances are still rarities, however. One of the last I heard was at the Leeds Festival in 1953, when Sir Malcolm Sargent conducted most things in a breezy, unsubtle, unfeeling way more suitable to "The Pirates of Penzance".

"A Mass of Life" was written in 1904-5 and is a setting of parts of Nietzsche's "Thus Spake Zarathustra." Those who think of Delius only as a dreaming nature-poet will be shaken out of their superficial judgment by the powerful and muscular opening chorus of the Mass, one of the finest passages in English choral music and a complete answer to the criticism that Delius had no real grasp of structural methods..... Let us hope it (this performance) is the prelude to a new recording.

MICHAEL KENNEDY.

Daily Telegraph, 21st January, 1970.

GROVES PUTS DELIUS' "MASS" BACK ON MAP

Charles Groves performed a great service for music last night when, at the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Concert in the Philharmonic Hall, he showed to a new generation and perhaps to some sceptics of an older generation, that Delius' "A Mass of Life" is truly a masterpiece. In any event, he put it back on the map.

Even the most convinced Delian can hardly have heard this long and elaborate work very often.

Liverpool had not heard it since 1936 (Manchester about the same date?) and post-war performances cannot number more than about a dozen.

It used to be thought that only Beecham could penetrate to its core, but Mr. Groves effectively disposed of that myth among others.

The most important of the others was that Delius' "lush" harmonies and romantical outlook somehow add up orchestrally to nothing but soothing syrup.

The outstanding feature of this memorable performance was its revelation of the beautiful clarity of the scoring. The orchestral texture was always clear as the noonday of which Nietzsche's text is a celebration,

Mr. Groves also achieved the almost impossible feat of making the chorus' la-la-la-ing and tra-la-la-ing sound natural and unembarrassing. He did this by careful balance and attention to rhythm and dynamics, and the Liverpool Philharmonic Choir, who sang magnificently all the evening, followed his lead to perfection.

The "Mass" was composed under the shadow of "Tristan" and is really also a long love-poem, an excuse for Delius to indulge his Hedonist outlook.

It is English music only by naturalisation for nobody, not even Elgar, was writing in such a cosmopolitan European idiom in 1904, although the accompaniment to some of the Forest section of Part II is curiously Elgarian in the intricate writing for strings.

Influences don't matter, however; every note is Delius not so pure and not so simple, a master of sensuous sound.

From the exhilarating opening double chorus to the final tremendous outburst, the music sustains interest, despite the number of slow episodes, most of them for the baritone soloist; and of course it is into these that Delius pours his most bewitching music.

I seem to remember that Fischer-Dieskau made his English debut in a Beecham performance of this work, but even he can hardly have sung it with more intensity of feeling and beauty of tone than Thomas Hemsley produced. Much of the emotional power of this occasion came from his understanding of the music's sense of timelessness.

The other soloists (Elizabeth Vaughan, Norma Procter, and Ryland Davies) have less to do and did it well, if not at Mr. Hemsley's level, but it was Charles Groves' evening. He inspired everyone with his own belief in this wonderful music - its nobility for sentimentality was utterly banished - and if there is a Delius Society award he ought to have it forthwith.

MICHAEL KENNEDY.

The Guardian. 21st January, 1970.

Delius' "A Mass of Life" gets few performances. Until the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society revived it (in the original German) in the Philharmonic Hall last night, it had been heard in Liverpool only once before. When this Liverpool performance is repeated in the Royal Festival Hall a week on Friday, it will be the first time for sixteen years and only the second since the hall opened. And yet it represents, in Nietzschean terms, the "great victory" in Delius' work and, with the possible exception of "A Village Romeo and Juliet", it is his most sustained inspiration.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about "A Mass of Life" is its daring shape: it begins with a chorus of ecstatic intensity and then offers fewer and fewer quick movements, though not discarding them entirely, until the different and more expansive sort of ecstasy in the final chorus. To prevent a construction like that from sagging in the middle requires extraordinary faith, as well as skill in performance. Perhaps it is for this reason apart from the expense of the enterprise, that the work is so rarely done, with the conductors unwilling to submit themselves to the exhausting experience (however rewarding) more than once or twice in a lifetime.

Clearly, Charles Groves, who conducted last night's performance, has no end of faith in the work. He obviously has a great affection for it and the evening would have been worthwhile if only for the sake of the brilliantly performed opening chorus. But, happily, there was far more to it than that. Thomas Hemsley was ideally cast as Zarathustra and sang particularly beautifully in that evening elegy in the section called "In the Forest". Ryland Thomas sang blissfully in "The Song of Life" and, of the other two soloists (Elizabeth Vaughan and Norma Procter) only the soprano seems not to have acquired the style of the piece.

The Liverpool Philharmonic Choir produced an admirable variety of tone colour together with an unusual degree of choral accuracy. And there was much very lovely nature description in the R.L.P.O.'s generally very sympathetic performance.

GERALD LARNER

The Liverpool Post. 31st January, 1970.

Although London has had only a five-year gap, as opposed to Liverpool's thirty, between performances of Delius' "A Mass of Life", it is thanks to Liverpool that one can say so, since last night it was the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir who gave us a remarkable performance of this strangely-neglected masterpiece.

In it, Delius' unique gifts as a composer are seen at their fullest stretch and if at times it seemed somewhat untypical in its size, architecture, toughness of ideas and moments of exultant optimism, it could nevertheless have been written by no-one else.

This difficult work's range and variety has been superbly mastered by conductor Charles Groves who has already proved his special sympathy for and understanding of Delius' music.

There was some exciting choral sound and a fine team of soloists including Elizabeth Vaughan, Norma Procter, Ryland Davies.

It was led by Thomas Helmsley whose completely authoritative and moving Zarathustra gave us the very heart of the work.

JOHN CHRISTOPHER

Footnote: A letter from Charles Groves to Mr. Lovgreen:-

5th February, 1970.

Dear Mr. Lovgreen,

Thank you very much for your kind letter. I am extremely glad that we were able to give "A Mass of Life" this season. I heard before the concert that many people were anticipating not enjoying the evening but in the end all seemed to be well and judging by the reception both in Liverpool and London we scored a hit.

For my part, I want no medals for the privilege of being able to prepare properly and give two performances of this great work and I am happy if a few more converts are made.

You may be interested to hear that we are hoping to play "Life's Dance" next season.*

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Charles Groves.

(* no longer the case, unfortunately - Ed.)

MUSICAL PROFILE - CHARLES GROVES

By Henry Raynor.

You have just heard Charles Groves conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in one of those works - the slow movement of the Pastoral Symphony - which seems to me to be one of the great tests of a conductor's skill and musicianship. If you make it as restfully relaxed as it should be, you probably slow it up, and the music sags. If you remember that it's marked *andante molto mosso* and keep it moving, you probably make it sound restless. It isn't often as it should be, the life in the lower parts never forgotten but balanced against the restfulness of the melody. That record seems to me to keep the balance nicely and, in addition to that, it doesn't dress the music up, or give it any cosmetics or perfumes. It simply trusts the composer and does what he wants.

It isn't that Charles Groves is an emotionally cold conductor or anything like that, but simply that by the time he gets to a performance, the poetry and imagination are there so long as his precise directions are carried out. Actually, the results are often overpoweringly emotional, the musical gestures, as distinct from the conductorial gestures, are huge and powerful. It is Charles Groves who has reintroduced us to many things like the grandly impassioned funeral march in Elgar's incidental music to *Grania and Diarmid*.

Charles Groves has always been firmly attached to an orchestra, always since 1944, a 'permanent conductor' although easy travel and the fashion of commuting between continents has weakened the idea of permanent conductorship, so that many celebrity conductors are never for very long in any one place. Groves was conductor of the B.B.C. Northern Orchestra from 1944 to 1951. Then he spent twelve years with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. For the last seven years he has been permanent conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He believes that a conductor needs a close link with an orchestra and that orchestras need a close link with a permanent conductor. There has to be someone to do the administrative work and to settle the human problems. Somebody has to decide where A and B should sit on the platform when they can't work happily sitting side by side. And somebody has to be available to see that the essentials of ensemble style are preserved. An entire season's programmes has to be planned so that all the necessary ground is covered, to co-ordinate programmes with guest conductors to avoid duplications. He doesn't say that somebody has to be available to extend the repertory, to work at the big new compositions which should be part of the repertory but which demand more rehearsal than the guest conductor is likely to be able to fit into his schedule. Since the War, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic has been one of the most adventurous orchestras - it has been lucky enough to have had adventurous conductors - and under Charles Groves

it continues to play not only new works but out of the way, neglected ones. The Elgar Funeral March, the big Delius works, symphonies by Bax, the Berlioz Te Deum, all the Mahler symphonies, Messiaen's Turangalila Symphony - all these have become part of the Liverpool repertory or at least have been played in Liverpool since he went there.

In a way, he seems to suggest that Liverpool itself is partly responsible for this. Like most outsiders who go to live there, he finds the city exciting and its people good company. It has a very fine concert hall and a very lively, accomplished, adaptable orchestra. But it has, too, a generous municipal attitude to music. The orchestra is well supported by the City Council; there is even a special purposes fund which makes it possible for the orchestra to settle down to work through extended rehearsals when some specially difficult, elaborate work is to be heard. All this obviously appeals to Charles Groves much more than the prospect of endless travel from city to city with a repertory of about a dozen works, six from the mainstream and six from outside it. He is not, so to speak, housebound. He has a long and effective relationship with the Royal Philharmonic, and he is heard more often than any other English conductor in Munich, where he is a highly regarded, welcome visitor.

The catholicity of his tastes not only supports the way of life he has chosen. It also leads to unusual discoveries. For example, this music, which sounds almost like Schumann speaking in a foreign accent and saying something we never expected him to say, is the beginning of the last movement of Sullivan's Irish Symphony, a recent Groves rediscovery that was well worth rediscovering.

Of course, Charles Groves knows that metropolitan musicians tend to disregard most of the work that is done by provincial orchestras, but, a week or two ago, he seemed more interested in the World Cup and a poignant inquest on England versus Czechoslovakia than expressing any resentments. He laments the scarcity of opera in the North West, but what matters is the work he does, not what other people say about it. This year he will be at the Warsaw Festival, with a programme that includes not only new Polish avant-garde music but Thea Musgrave's Clarinet Concerto. Last week on the radio, we heard his account of Delius' The Mass of Life (sic). Delius bulks large, as I've said, in his programmes, and he knows how big the great, passionate cries of loss in the music should be. He admires Beecham, he declares, close to idolatry, but study of Delius' scores persuaded him that the Beechamesque doctrine, which Sir Thomas amusingly declared whenever he could, that not even Delius cared what happened below the melodic line, couldn't possibly be true. Charles Groves' gift for making large, elaborate and complex scores lucid and lithe, comes out as he reaches the climax of Songs of Sunset, one of those works in which Delius made of faded nineties verse something uniquely powerful. He sees this music not as something fragrant, colourful and picturesque but simply as great music.

(A broadcast in Music Magazine - B.B.C. Radio 3, Sunday, June 28th, 1970, and reproduced with permission of the Corporation.)

'KOANGA' IN WASHINGTON

The Washington Post. October, 1970.

An Opera Cancelled

A disagreement with composer Virgil Thomson over the staging of his opera, "Four Saints in Three Acts", has led the Opera Society of Washington to cancel plans for December performances here. Instead, the Society will give the U.S. premiere of "Koanga" by Frederick Delius.

The argument over "Four Saints" arose when the composer vetoed plans for staging drawn up by John Butler. Thomson insisted that his agreement with G. Schirmer, the publisher who controls "Four Saints", gave him power to approve or reject all aspects of any proposed production. A spokesman for Schirmer said this is true, adding that every composer has the same rights.

Hobart Spalding, president of the Opera Society, pointed out that the Society has given operas by six living composers, several of whom took part in the productions, and that all six had approved of their works as presented.

The six have been Igor Stravinsky, who conducted both lives performances of his "Oedipus Rex" and "Nightingale", Gian Carlo Menotti, Samuel Barber, Alberto Ginastera, whose "Bomarzo" had its world premiere here and was subsequently recorded by the Society; Benjamin Britten and Lee Hoiby.

Spalding said that he told Thomson that the Opera Society could not be expected to proceed with an \$80,000 production under the shadow of the composer's veto at any point. Butler, engaged by the Society several months ago, is a distinguished director whose credits include the choreography for the first performances of Menotti's "The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore".

Thomson, who will celebrate his 75th birthday next year is one of this country's leading composers. He was also music critic of the New York Herald Tribune for more than a decade. "Four Saints in Three Acts" written to the famous text by Gertrude Stein, was first performed in 1934.

Spalding said that "Koanga" by Delius will be given on the same dates as those set for "Four Saints" with a Dec. 18 opening. Paul Calloway will conduct and Frank Corsaro⁺ one of the principal stage directors of the New York City, will direct. A number of the singers engaged for the Thomson opera will sing in the Delius.

Delius, born in Bradford, England, in 1862, came to Southeastern United States in 1884, to raise oranges at Soland Grove, a plantation

on the St. John's River near Jacksonville. A year later he moved to Danville, Va., where he taught music and languages before moving to New York City where he worked as an organist. In 1886 he went back to England and then to France where he died in 1934.

An annual festival of Delius music is given in Jacksonville each January. "Koanga", which had its premiere in Elberfeld, Germany, in 1904, is one of three* operas by Delius. It is one of several works he wrote under the inspiration of the atmosphere and music of the regions of this country that he knew.

PAUL HUME.

In enclosing the above cutting, Mr. Foose writes:

"The performances will be given at the Lisner Auditorium "which belongs to the George Washington University, but is actually located in the heart of the city, about five blocks from the White House," on the 18th December at 8 p.m. (the premiere), on Sunday, 20th December at 3 p.m., and on 21st December at 7.30 p.m. The multi-media sets are by Ronald Chase, with costumes by Joseph Bella. The distinguished cast includes Eugene Holmes, Claudia Lindsey, Edward Pierson, Will Roy and William McDonald."

+ Frank Corsaro has recently joined the Society.

* An obvious error - Ed.

MIDLANDS' MISCELLANY

24th April, 1970. Shirley Clover entertained us at Leicester to a most splendid repast with alcoholic refreshment. We also had some music ... this was a programme of items by friends of Delius and included a piano roll of Greig playing (none too well) Norwegian Bridal Procession. Roger Quilter, Balfour Gardiner, Elgar conducting Falstaff, the Charles Kennedy Scott Choir, Warlock and Grainger. We welcomed new Midlands member Robert Johnson from Stoke.

R.B.K.

26th June, 1970. The Musical Evening was really more of a perambulation this year. We started at the Dunn's for drinks (again...what are we coming to?) and then walked down the road to Dick Kitching's; this was due to the fact that Brian Dunn's bassoon gets on better with Dick's piano than with Brian's. There we had piano duets from Dick and Jerry Rowe, Sonatas for bassoon and piano by Galliard played by Brian (bassoon) and Dick (piano), and songs from Margaret Trotman; these were two songs

from Frauenlieben und Leben (Schumann), and Twilight Fancies and In a Seraglio Garden (Delius). We then perambulated back to the Dunn's for eats and part two of the Concert including a Bassoon and Horn Duo by Mozart (arranged by Messrs. Dunn and Peter Trotman) which unfortunately proved abortive due to the horn falling to pieces! More piano duets followed, and the concert ended with a group of Mozart Notturmi sung by Joan Dunn and Margaret Trotman (Sopranos), Shirley Clover (Contralto) and Peter Trotman and Brian Dunn (Tenor and Bass or vice-versa).

R.B.K.

11th October, 1970. Our host was Peter Thorp who paid tribute to the late Sir John Barbirolli. A resume of the maestro's career was punctuated by excerpts from his recordings that for many of us coloured personal recollections of live performances. Beginning with the luminous sonorities of Elgar's A flat Symphony, Sir John's championship of English music was chronicled by a series of extracts ranging from Purcell and John Bull to Bax (Tintagel) and Vaughan-Williams (8th Symphony), this last noteworthy for the composer's dedication of it to the conductor. Barbirolli's performances of Delius' music, though sometimes differing considerably from those of Beecham (especially with regard to tempi), were unmistakably heartfelt and comprehending. We heard part of "In a Summer Garden" and "Walk to the Paradise Garden". One reflected on Barbirolli's almost total eschewal of the world of Opera, but what might he have made of "A Village Romeo and Juliet"? Our thanks are due to our host for an absorbing evening, his commentary and musical selections made doubly satisfying by the accompanying libations of 7 year old Chateau Thorp wine and Mr. and Mrs. Thorp's lavish supper.

E.E.R.