

three-quarters of a century; it probes through detailed scrutiny of primary and secondary sources the relationship between two musicians of the front rank, one creative, the other executive; it documents the growth of recording and broadcasting from the early days to the point where access to top-class performances in the home became ubiquitous; it provides in its carefully referenced wealth of documentary material an important research resource for historians of concert giving and performance practice alike. It is, however, not entirely without blemish. King George VI was crowned on 9 May 1937, not 1936 as stated on p. 109. (The date is correctly given in the performance list on p. 123.) Boult's 1972 performance of Symphony No. 1 in Liverpool is variously given as 2 October (p. 74), then 3 October in the chronologies on pp. 87 and 285. (It was in fact Tuesday, 3 October.) More generally, Simeone does not entirely avoid falling into that hoary old trap laid for the unwary when he states that Toscanini was 'widely considered to be the greatest conductor of his age' (p. 130). This was after all the age of, *inter alia*, Bruno Walter and Wilhelm Furtwängler, the latter a regular visitor to these shores who even today generates an almost cult-like following of his own. As Adorno and others point out, the shibboleth of the 'great conductor' is fraught with critical difficulties and misperceptions. At the time of Toscanini there were many competing claims to that particular crown.

Elgar is now regularly performed in concert halls in the UK and increasingly so abroad. Yet a good deal of his output remains peripheral. Works such as *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* both contain fine music but are hardly ever heard, and even pieces such as the early *Froissart* overture appear only rarely. It is the core works championed and recorded, often multiple times, by Boult and others that have secured a place in the repertoire alongside the peaks of the European symphonic tradition. In 1904 a musically curious young Westminster schoolboy wondered whether Elgar's music would live. It has and it does. What Nigel Simeone's fine book demonstrates so convincingly is that this is in no small measure due to the lifelong commitment and dedication of Sir Adrian Cedric Boult.

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*Vaughan Williams in Context*. Edited by Julian Onderdonk and Ceri Owen. Pp. xxiv + 316. Composers in Context. (Cambridge University Press, 2024. ISBN 978-1-108-49332-1, £90.00.)

In just the last three decades, Ralph Vaughan Williams has received the full complement of biographical, critical, and musical treatments usually afforded 'great composers'. While a unified *Gesamtausgabe* seems unlikely for the foreseeable future (with his works tied up under copyrights stewarded by different publishers), Oxford University Press and Stainer & Bell have been issuing new critical editions of select works—both obscure and standard repertory. New Vaughan Williams recordings continue apace, with several premiere recordings in recent years. A large sample of his voluminous correspondence has appeared in print (*Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895–1958*, ed. Hugh Cobbe (Oxford, 2009)), with considerably more made available online (<https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/discover/letters/>). Eric Saylor's new biography (Oxford, 2022) has joined a rather long list of predecessors, and there are numerous volumes of essays aimed at readerships ranging from analysis seminar to general listener. RVW has 'made it', and he takes the eleventh spot in Cambridge's 'Composers in Context' series, well ahead of some other big names one might expect.

An implicit challenge for contributors to this series is to determine how much to focus on the composer and how much on those contextual facets assembled in such a volume. In *Vaughan Williams in Context*, some of the chapters tend towards a narrower approach of Vaughan Williams's own interactions within his culture, while others offer a much broader panorama in which he is merely one figure among many on the canvas. Nevertheless, each of the essays is a stimulating read, not least for bringing detail and understanding about that have generally remained out of focus and undifferentiated in other RVW literature. Of the thirty-two contributors, only five come from outside the discipline of musicology (broadly defined), but insightful commentary about the music itself sometimes emerges in unexpected places, such as Tim Barringer's fascinating chapter, 'Visual Art'.

Happily, the only negative comment I have to offer about this book concerns its sprawling and unwieldy 'Further Reading' section (pp. 283–

300), a section that different volumes of the series have addressed in slightly different ways. For *Vaughan Williams in Context*, this section includes first ‘General Vaughan Williams Literature’ (subdivided into seven sections), followed by brief reading lists for each chapter in turn. Inevitably there is some duplication—not only when the same source comes up in two chapter reading lists, but also when a source appears in both a chapter list and the general literature section. ‘Further reading’ suggests to me a list of readings not already cited in the footnotes of a given chapter, yet time and again sources that appear in the footnotes are listed again as a suggested ‘further’ resource. Add to this that the most important sources drawn upon by many of the contributors—and thus worth an abbreviated form of citation—are also listed in the table of abbreviations (pp. xxii–xxiii), and perhaps one may grasp why the references began to feel to me like a hall of mirrors. If we are to have individual reading lists for each chapter, I would rather have each list appended to the end of the relevant chapter, and purged of anything already in that chapter’s notes. From a ‘Composers in Context’ volume I expect guidance in what resources to turn to probe further into some contextual issue, not for the literature concerning the composer. For that—as the editors indicate—there are other more comprehensive bibliographies. So why duplicate those efforts, even in a small way?

After an introduction by the editors, the book is divided into six sections, each with at least four chapters: ‘Biography, People, Places’; ‘Inspiration and Expression’; ‘Culture and Society’; ‘Arts’; ‘Institutions’; and ‘Reception’. I am tempted to gloss this as the alternation of sections that focus more on the *person* of Vaughan Williams and sections that focus on his *music*, although it is always a little more complex than that. While a reader might quibble with the placement of a chapter in this scheme (e.g. Why is ‘Amateur Music and Musicians’ in Part II rather than in Part III?), the editors’ scheme is sound.

Without exception the chapters make valuable contributions, probing usefully into new areas, and making connections between things that have not sufficiently been explored before. David Manning’s chapter, ‘Personality’, brings together many ideas that show up sporadically in biographical treatments but have not to my knowledge been assembled so constructively before. Among the composer’s works, *Job: A Masque for Dancing* is a focus for discussion in many chapters—lifting it to a prominence it has not hitherto received. Rishona Zimring’s chapter ‘Dance’ takes that term at its most capacious, encompassing ballet, ballroom, and folk dancing.

Similarly, what might have been a chapter on merely ‘the Church’ becomes a much more vivid and varied ‘Christian Socialism and *The English Hymnal*’, by Kate Palmer Heathman. The chapter ‘Literature’ by Matthew Ingleby and Ceri Owen left me with the impression that Vaughan Williams was the most literary composer since Schumann. Chapter after chapter are both stimulating and novel.

Foremost of these must surely be Erica Siegel’s chapter ‘Women’, a long-overdue assessment of Vaughan Williams’s (mis-)behaviour towards women, and in particular the ‘Uncle Ralph’ persona he assumed especially among his female students and others over whom he enjoyed a position of authority. It reads not so much as a #metoo calling-out as it does an indictment of a culture in which such behaviour was not just condoned or encouraged for those in power, but even expected. RVW’s actions of entitlement say more about his societal context and the latitude accorded his privileged status than they do about his own specific culpability. As such, Siegel’s chapter in particular deserves a very wide readership, as it is merely scratching the surface of issues common to so many of his male cultural contemporaries.

There is not adequate space here to give even a few sentences of appreciation to all the contributors: even where a chapter is covering well-trodden ground there is nevertheless a host of new insights, and the default is to complexify a topic that might otherwise be treated perfunctorily. The richest section of the book is probably ‘Institutions’, in that the interplay of different sorts of institutions are revealed over and over again in the five chapters that focus on issues bigger than any one institution can comprehend: David C. H. Wright’s chapter “‘Wanting” the Home-Grown Composer: Opportunities and Encouragement after the First World War’ adroitly manages to incorporate the economics of music publishing (both with the old houses like Novello and Boosey, as well as the new OUP Music Department), the innovative pedagogy of the Royal College of Music, and the effect of the reach of the BBC—compressed into a tiny word count and leaving one wanting more, but equally dazed at the efficiency of the treatment.

It is gratifying, then, to turn to the next chapter (Simon McVeigh’s ‘Concert Life and Programming’) and see how much it overlaps with Wright’s foci—with the OUP and the BBC again heavily invested in how Vaughan Williams’s music reached the public ear. Lest we assume that Vaughan Williams was somehow always an audience favourite, McVeigh’s data is a good reminder that it was hard for Vaughan

Williams and his contemporaries to get a hearing at all, particularly outside of the festival circuit, and that London orchestras were not quick to add any of his symphonies into their regular repertory. By the 1930s, his orchestral music came to be regularly programmed, and then a large audience could get to know his voice; but even so the music that was being more regularly heard was sometimes decades old, and the reception of his works remained uneven. McVeigh's chapter—underscored by Duncan Hinnells's 'Working with the BBC'—reveals that it was really the work of a fairly small number of influential and persistent champions (especially Balfour Gardiner, Adrian Boult, Dan Godfrey, Hubert Foss, and—at long last—Henry Wood and John Barbirolli) being in the right places at the right times (and with the right resources) to transform Vaughan Williams into the cultural hero he would become.

At first, the institution missing from this volume seemed to me to be 'the Establishment'—particularly given Vaughan Williams's subsequent reputation as an establishment figure (no matter what pains he took in life to distance himself from it)—but it is treated very handily in a chapter on 'The Arts Council and Evolving Public Policy' co-written by Andrew Pinnock and Julian Onderdonk. Here we see Vaughan Williams not merely as an ideological champion of the amateur, but as a skilful bureaucratic operator within the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (latterly the Arts Council of Great Britain), effectively thwarting some of the efforts of the chair John Maynard Keynes to direct resources to the arts professionals who catered for the tastes of the wealthy at the expense of more populist efforts. As Pinnock and Onderdonk conclude, Vaughan Williams 'took all sorts of musician seriously and he proved that by bothering to write for them' (p. 231). This in itself is not news, but it is a useful framing of the broader context of such an important composer.

At first glance the title of Heather Wiebe's splendid chapter 'The Second World War: A National Figure' was a puzzle; there was already an excellent chapter titled 'War' by Eric Saylor, which discusses Vaughan Williams's involvement in both world wars. But Wiebe's approach situates the composer himself as a national institution from the 1940s until his death—and that this new-found cultural significance ('prestige' seems to me a word that Vaughan Williams would not have wanted to claim for himself) has an inevitable impact on the man and on the reception of his music. He had become venerable; even untouchable—the 'RVW' codified in

two official-seeming publications from Oxford University Press in 1964 (just six years after his death): the biography written by his widow, Ursula (*R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*) and the profusely descriptive work catalogue by Michael Kennedy (*The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 1st edn.). These works cemented the iconic and emblematic status that RVW had acquired during the war years, and it has been difficult to dislodge. That task has been the work of a number of scholars in the last thirty years, and this book serves as a milestone of that accomplishment. Removing the distracting and distorting pedestal on which he was placed is not iconoclasm: it is merely a firm conviction that Ralph Vaughan Williams stands very well with both feet planted firmly on the ground.

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*The Italian-American Musical Experience: A Journey from Busoni to Berio.* By Valentina Bensi. Pp. xxxii + 383. (Libreria Musicale Italiana, Lucca, 2023. ISBN 9788855433112, €45.)

The main title of Valentina Bensi's book, *The Italian-American Musical Experience*, could apply to some among the 17 million Americans of Italian ancestry identified as 'Italian-Americans'. One might expect that the book is about the musical experience of outstanding 'Italian-American' composers like Walter Piston, Paul Creston, Vittorio Giannini, Vincent Persichetti, Norman Dello Joio, Henry Mancini, and John Corigliano. But the subtitle informs us that it is instead *A Journey from Busoni to Berio*, i.e. from Ferruccio Busoni, Rosario Scalero, Alfredo Casella, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Luigi Dallapiccola, Gian Carlo Menotti, and Nino Rota to Luciano Berio. What caused the misunderstanding, though? Perhaps it is due to the hyphen that commonly serves as a semantic device to distinguish the solidly constructed, bicultural identity of diasporic groups. This definition seems at odds with a book dedicated solely to the American musical experience of Italian composers who, in the span of two generations, concertized extensively throughout the United States. They studied at prestigious