



Compiled and edited by Simon Rawlings FRMS committee member

From the Chairman's desk

As I write this it is New Year's Eve; in a few hours' time we will be turning the page, as it were, on 2022 and starting a new chapter, headed '2023'. What will the coming year hold for us?

Despite the turmoil and political upheavals in this country and the world, the past year has seen societies returning to some sort of normality – will this trend continue, or will it be derailed by rising costs? Could we see a return to the ethos of the early days of the Federation, when societies enabled individual members to pool resources to achieve what might be beyond an individual's means? That's an intriguing thought but much has changed since those times; listening habits are quite different, with music round the clock on radio and a vast repertoire of recorded music available on CD or to download. So, the danger is that attendance at one's local RMS may become one of those little luxuries that has to be cut out. Another consideration for societies is that the cost of hiring the venue may become unaffordable or the venue may be forced to close.

But let's look beyond those gloomy prospects and hope for better. On a more positive note, plans are going ahead for a Federation Music Weekend in April and we hope to have full details shortly; meanwhile make a note of the dates – 14th to 16th April.

A Happy New Year to all.

Allan Child, FRMS Chairman

The 2023 FRMS Music Weekend!



We are pleased to announce that the 2023 Music Weekend is to be held at the Derby Conference Centre, London Road, Derby from Friday 14th to Sunday 16th April.

The programme is still in preparation, but presenters will include Norman Lebrecht, John Pickard, Robert Quinney, and Nigel Simeone, together with our own 'resident composer' (and FRMS Treasurer), Paul Corfield Godfrey.

Derby is conveniently situated at the junction of major rail routes and close to the M1, A38 and A50 roads. The Derby Conference Centre was formerly the LMS, and later British Rail, School of Transport. Now privately run, it has been modernised as a fully equipped conference centre and hotel.



Photos Credit:
Derby Conference Centre

Full details of the programme, cost, and booking arrangements will be circulated shortly, by e-mail where possible, and posted on the FRMS website. If you would like to receive a personal copy, please feel free to register your interest by e-mail to chairman@thefrms.co.uk

AGM 2022

Our first live AGM since 2019 was a much-anticipated event and the Leicester Music Society had gone to great efforts to create an interesting and stimulating programme for us all to enjoy. Unfortunately, as with all best laid plans, things did not go quite as smoothly as we had hoped. One major obstacle was the national rail strike which was scheduled to take place that weekend and created serious problems for travellers on the Saturday. It meant that neither the Chairman, Secretary nor Treasurer were able to get to Leicester. We were fortunate that a Zoom attendance option was available for the actual AGM – so that we were all able to attend remotely and the business part of the meeting was able to go ahead. However, numbers were lower than anticipated for the rest of the day: the talk by composer Will Todd, the dinner, and the live music entertainment from the Beaufort Quintet. This was a real shame, particularly when such work had been put into making the day a success. It is hard for me to say very much about these events as I wasn't there – so I have asked Ron Mitchell, our Website Manager and the Secretary of Leicester Music Society, to add a few comments here.

However, before handing over to Ron, I wanted to say that the national committee is now starting to plan for our next AGM in 2023 and we have asked affiliate societies, through a survey, for their views on the format that this should take. We can continue to offer a live AGM as we did at Leicester. Sadly, though, we must acknowledge that, even without the rail strike, attendance was much lower than has been the case previously and there appears to be a continued reluctance to travel that the post-Covid normal has not reversed. It may well be that the days of holding a live AGM are now behind us. Alternatively, in 2020 and 2021, we held an exclusively digital meeting using Zoom technology, and this was well attended. I hope to be able to confirm what is agreed after our next committee meeting in January.

In the meantime, I'll hand over to Ron ...

Adele Wills, FRMS Secretary

Attendance for the rest of the AGM Day, though low, was not tiny. We had around twenty, most of whom were members or guests of the Leicester Music Society.



Will Todd was a very engaging speaker.



Although the subject concerned his own music, he spoke about it very modestly and humorously. We heard how as a child he found he couldn't play a black-note glissando on the family piano and ingeniously solved the problem with the aid of a screwdriver from his father's toolbox. Then early attempts with school friends to record music on cassette recorders and whatever other equipment gradually became available. We learned what was involved in the modern recording process. For example, how for his Jazz Passion Music the drum-kit track was recorded first in a carefully controlled close studio acoustic, then the instrumental parts layered on, and finally the vocal parts recorded in the warm ambience of a church, with choir, conductor and soloist all listening to the previously recorded material on headphones. He illustrated all this with YouTube videos. Will was very happy to be interrupted by questions from the occasional member of the audience bewildered by all the technology. Such as 'What exactly is a click-track?'

The dinner that followed was excellent. The evening ended with a very entertaining recital by Leicester's Beaufort Wind Quintet.



Their material ranged from light to serious: Holst, Anton Reicha and Eric Hughes. And a set of variations on the Welsh 'Sospas Fach' to celebrate the birth of Prince George, by several composers, including our own Leicester Chairman, David Fisher.

It was a shame that so few were able to attend; those who did had a very enjoyable day.

Ron Mitchell

The Reluctant Symphonist

Last year marked the 150th anniversary of this country's leading symphonic composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams (b.12 October 1872). I know of no other composer since Beethoven who has written nine symphonies that are so different from each other and yet so unlike the work of any other composer. And yet originally, he had no ambition to compose music of that genre.

"I don't do symphonies!"

When his younger friend, George Butterworth (1885–1916), called upon him one day in 1911 he found VW in a state of some consternation surrounded by loose leaves of scores. Asked what the problem was VW told Butterworth that he had been writing sketches based on his impressions of London and didn't have a clue what to do with them; could Butterworth have a look and see if he could make anything of them? Butterworth did so and suggested that he should write a symphony. VW's scornful riposte was: "No! That won't do at all. I don't do symphonies! Not that sort of symphony anyway!" (or words to that effect). Later, when they met again, VW was quite changed and told Butterworth: "You were quite right, you know. You've solved the problem." And that is how the *London Symphony* came into being. VW had, of course, already produced *A Sea Symphony* – the first fully choral symphony – with great success at the Leeds Festival of 1910 following the success of his Parry-inspired cantata *Toward the Unknown Region* at the previous. Each of these works was a setting of words by the American poet Walt Whitman. The *Tallis Fantasia* soon followed and established him as an up-and-coming composer – he was already forty!

But this was different. It took a lot of work with much help from Butterworth. When finished in 1913 it was over an hour in duration. The first performance took place at the Queen's Hall in London (where else!) conducted by Geoffrey Toye and was well received. Other performances soon followed. In August the manuscript score was apparently sent to Germany for a prospective performance: it was never seen again! For the next scheduled performance on 11 February 1915 the score was reconstructed from the orchestra's parts with the help of Butterworth, Toye and Edward Dent. With some somewhat sprawling passages, the symphony was clearly in need of some drastic revision. VW recognized this and did not stint in the task. The first movement was left virtually untouched, but he excised some twenty minutes from the three remaining movements. There were further revisions in the next twenty years before the symphony as we know it now was published in 1936. Richard Hickox's superb recording of the near-original 1913 version shows just how much very fine music had to be left

behind. However, what London might have lost the symphony's structure gained. As Geraint Lewis has said: "...his cutting creates a masterpiece out of a potentially great work – quite an achievement."

Ten years after the completion of the original version, when the world had changed beyond all recognition, Vaughan Williams said to another friend (perhaps Gustav Holst): "I've written a new symphony. Four movements. All of 'em slow." All of 'em quiet would have been a more accurate description.

It was deceptively called *A Pastoral Symphony*, but that is another story – and another masterpiece.

[With acknowledgements to Laurence Green: *George Butterworth, Soldier and Composer*; published in 2018 by Fighting High Ltd. A highly recommendable biography.]

Dennis Darling, Weston-Super-Mare MAS

More information about the life and music of RVW can be obtained from the **Ralph Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust** - <http://www.rvwtrust.org.uk/> and the **Ralph Vaughan Williams Society** - www.rvwsociety.com

Graham Ladley

We heard recently that Graham Ladley, a longstanding member of Oswestry RMS, passed away on 17th November after a few months of declining health. Paul Astell, Chairman of Oswestry RMS and FRMS Vice-President, writes: "For many years Graham was a good friend to me, our society, and the recorded music movement in general. He served in all the officer roles at our society and had been President since 2014. He was one of the wisest and most knowledgeable people I've ever known, and he will be much missed."

FRMS Chairman Allan Child adds "I knew Graham as one of those people who gets on with a job quietly and without fuss. He served on the FRMS Committee for a time and had previously played an impartial role in helping to resolve tensions within the Federation – all with a generous amount of good humour and common sense."

We extend our sympathy to members of his family and of Oswestry RMS.

A tribute to the late Mick Birchall by Northampton RMS



A programme given on 10 October 2022 by Michael Henderson

Just over a year ago, a member of this society died: Mick Birchall. He had also been a Vice Chairman and Minutes Secretary of the National Federation and a member of the Hinckley Society. He gave programmes here, in Hinckley and at the Rushden Society and they were all eagerly awaited. He put a great deal of effort into programmes and did a lot of work behind the scenes, having been on the national committee for about 20 years.

Mick's programmes always included music that most members were not familiar with, and he often tried to be adventurous in his selections. He did not like the Classic FM approach, of whom it has been said that you are never more than 15 minutes away from a lark ascending and many other overplayed favourites.

Mick had been ill for a while and spent time in a nursing home, though he did return to his home in Desford. He had said he dreaded getting dementia, as we would all agree, but there was a heart problem in the end, I am told. Even when he was far from well, he had given programmes as far away as Higham Ferrers and never accepted expenses.

He spent time travelling, and was especially fond of Norway, the then Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Italy. He loved travelling and music. He lived in Desford all his life and was active in village affairs, being on the local council, as well as supporting sport and regularly walking footpaths.

Mick was a generous man and most of us probably remember what he brought on his birthday. His passing is a great loss to music societies.

The programme of music presented in tribute to Mick was:

1. Charles Avison, Concerto Grosso No 7 in G.
2. Four extracts from Berlioz's 'The Damnation of Faust'.
3. Respighi, the Villanelle from 'Ancient Airs and Dances'.

4. An extract from Janáček's opera 'Jenůfa'.
5. Robin Holloway, 'Gilded Goldbergs'.
6. Chopin, 'Polonaise in A flat' played by Ignacy Paderewski.
7. Brahms, last movement of his Violin Concerto with violin played by Ida Haendel.
8. Vaughan Williams, sixth scene from 'Job' – the Dance of Job's Comforters.
9. Bartok, 'Maramaros Dances'.
10. Dvořák, from 'Slavonic Dances', Dance no 7 in C.
11. Schubert, Andante from E Flat Piano Trio.
12. Michael Tippett, 'Deep River' from 'A Child of Our Time'.

Forwarded by Mike Leonard, Northampton RMS

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If you are now willing to receive future newsletters electronically instead of hard copies, and have not already notified us of this, please contact:
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*The next newsletter is planned for September 2023.
Please send any society news or articles in good time.*

Current and past Newsletters can be downloaded at:
www.thefrms.co.uk
