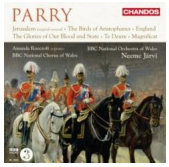
Parry – Jerusalem-England-The Birds-Te Deum (2012)



Te Deum For Coronation Of George V *01] We Praise Thee O God 02] Holy Holy Holy Lord God Of Sabaoth 03] The Glorious Company Of The Apostles Praise Thee 04] When Thou Tookest Upon Thee To Deliver Man - We Believe That Thou Shalt Come To Be Our J~1 05] Vouchsafe O Lord To Keep Us This Day Without Sin - O Lord Let Thy Mercy Lighten Upon Us 06] England*
The Birds of Aristophanes *07] I Introduction Allegro - Poco Meno Mosso - Poco A Poco Meno Mosso 08] Ii Entry Of The Birds Allegretto - Accelerando - Con Fuoco 09] Iii Entracte Lento Sostenuto 10] Iv Waltz Moderato - Accelerando Poco A Poco - Piu Mosso 11] V Intermezzo Andantino Sostenuto 12] Vi Bridal March Of The Birds Allegro Moderato - Piu Moto - Tempo I - Allargando - Piu Mo~1 13] Jerusalem*
The Glories of Our Blood and State
14] I The Glories Of Our Blood And State - And In The Dust Be Equal Made 15] Ii Some Men With Swords May Real The Field 16] Iii The Garlands Wither On Your Brow - Your Heads Must Come - Only The Actions Of The Just
Magnificat
17] Magnificat Anima Mea Dominum 18] Quia Respexit Humilitatem 19] Et Misericordia 20] Fecit Potentiam 21] Suscepit Israel Puerum Suum 22] Sicut Locutus Est
Amanda Roocroft – soprano BBC National Chorus and Orchestra of Wales Neeme Järvi – conductor

Listening to this disc has made me ponder how we categorise and what we expect of creative people. Do we have certain expectations that we want fulfilled and when those artists move away from those comfortable preconceptions our ability to accept this 'different' work is challenged?

Here we have a disc of Parry - musical embodiment of State and Empire; Jerusalem, England, a Coronation Te Deum, a Magnificat dedicated to Queen Victoria and a suite of incidental music part of which featured at two royal weddings. It seems that Parry's music has been appropriated

to provide the sound-track for Britain as embodied by the royal family. This impression is reinforced by a liner note containing a foreword by Prince Charles and a cover picture of King George V in procession. So, who to turn to for this - seemingly - most British of discs? I suspect Neeme Järvi would not be the name to instantly spring to mind. I have no idea how often British music has featured in Järvi's concert programmes but I'm stuck to think of any British music discs (a couple of Britten recordings aside) at all in his massive discography. That said, Chandos and the BBCNOW are past-masters at this kind of repertoire and as such it is very fine but I do have a lingering feeling that there is missing the last degree of empathy that could lift this fine but rarely great music to another sphere.

To take the music in compositional order; the earliest work offered here is the suite from The Birds by Aristophanes. Parry was commissioned to provide the incidental music for the play and subsequently the six orchestral sequences have been edited into a suite for full orchestra. Liner-note writer Jeremy Dibble argues strongly on their behalf but truth be told this is amiably minor music. By far the most musical interest resides in the third movement Entr'acte and the following Waltz. The former has a Wagnerian flavour and reaches a well-paced climax. Most disappointing is the closing Bridal March. This was used at the weddings of both the Queen in 1947 and of Prince William last year. Järvi misses several tricks here with a reading just too fast and perfunctory to swagger. The interest lies in the fact that this march does clearly pre-echo the style and form that Elgar was to make his own but without the brilliance of orchestration or thematically memorable fibre. The funeral ode The Glories of our Blood and State that follows from the same year might seem to underline the linkage between land and monarch. In fact the text underlines the great democracy of death; "Death lays his icy hand on kings, Sceptre and Crown must tumble down and in the dust be equal made". Although this lasts a brief eight minutes this is an impressive concentrated work. Here and throughout the BBC National Chorus of Wales prove to be ardent and committed performers. They are aided by a ripely resonant recording that ensures that both chorus and orchestra are given an opulent and supportive acoustic in which to perform.

The 1897 setting of the Magnificat contains some of the most interesting music on the disc but at the same time demonstrates most clearly the problems faced by British composers in the 19th century. Simply put, that was how to create an individual body of work not overly in the sway of either the Austro/German tradition or the demands of British choral societies. Parry's Magnificat is a respectful - possibly too respectful - homage to Bach. The central Et misericordia is a gorgeous movement - a highlight of the whole disc. It features an extended solo violin obbligato - very much in the style of the Bach Passions - quite beautifully played here by leader Lesley Hatfield. It does sound very much "in the style of" and crafted rather than written in the white heat of inspiration. Again Jeremy Dibble argues persuasively as to the skill in construction and sheer craftsmanship at work. He even quotes Sir Henry Wood as failing to understand the work's fall from the repertoire. It really is not that hard to understand; there is not enough individuality or impact to demand attention. Don't forget at the same date Elgar was working on Caractacus and Gerontius was barely two years away. Again, I have the sneaking suspicion

that Järvi is a safe rather than wholly idiomatic pair of hands. The closing fugato chorus just runs away from itself too much to conjure up the sense of contrapuntal grandeur that others might have found to the work's benefit. Soprano Amanda Roocroft, here and elsewhere on the disc, sings well without stopping one in one's listening tracks. Much the same is true of the 1911 Coronation Te Deum. Again, the comparison to Elgar's Coronation contribution does few favours to Parry's more modest and slightly earnest effort. There's a pleasingly stomach-wobbling contribution from an organ and the extra trumpets already on hand to play I was Glad - at the Coronation not here! - add some ceremonial grandeur. Sadly, the air of the formulaic lingers with thoughtful semi-chorus answering the full-throated main choir. At seventeen minutes this rather outstays its welcome in the way the much briefer funeral ode patently did not.

If I'd had to date Parry's most famous work Jerusalem offhand I'm not quite sure what I would have said. Certainly not as late as the correct 1916. The interest in this performance is two-fold. Firstly, it follows the direction in the Curwen published edition that the first verse should be taken as a solo with the full unison choir joining in for the second. The other point of interest is that this performance uses Parry's own orchestration as opposed to the more common one made by Elgar in 1922. The bad news is that the Elgar version is without a shadow of a doubt better so whatever the interest in Roocroft's solid performance for a' lift and flare of eyes' look elsewhere.

Just two years later, seeking a follow-up to the instant acclaim of Jerusalem, Parry set an adaptation of John of Gaunt's famous speech from Shakespeare's Richard II. It is the speech which starts; "This royal throne of Kings, this sceptred island...." - the white-heat of inspiration which Jerusalem undoubtedly possesses did not strike twice and the unison form ends up sounding rather like the song of a second-rank public school.

This will read as damning with faint praise - which was exactly the thought that brought to mind the idea with which I open this review. With Jerusalem and I Was Glad Parry wrote two of the greatest occasional pieces in the literature of British music. They were and remain occasional works and do not represent the bulk or the most typical music of their creator.

Interestingly, I am reading for review purposes in parallel with this disc a study of key choral works of the English Musical Renaissance. The Parry works that are singled out there are examples of his six so-called Ethical Cantatas (1902-08) as being both his best and most personal works. With the exception of The Soul’s Ransom (Chandos CHAN 241-31) they have not been recorded and are all but unknown today which reflects that perhaps what we want of Parry is Jerusalem and more Jerusalem. If that is indeed the case then Chandos has done it

proud. I don't know if it’s my imagination but the Hoddinott Hall sounds slightly more resonant than usual but that is wholly appropriate. The BBC National Chorus of Wales sing lustily or sensitively as the music requires - I could imagine a greater volume of sound from the choir but again that's as much to do with the theatricality of the music as with anything else. The BBCNOW are their usual reliable selves. My instinct is that another conductor could have found an ounce more sweep and lofty idealism in this music - this is not really the kind of cut-and-thrust musical drama that seems to suit Järvi best. Usual Chandos high production values apply; Jeremy Dibble's informative note is in three languages and full text in English only (or Latin with English translation) are given. An interesting but not obligatory purchase. ---Nick Barnard, musicweb-international.com

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