



BRITISH MUSIC

FOR VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA

Vaughan Williams • Howells • Walton • Bowen

Helen Callus, Viola

New Zealand
Symphony Orchestra

Marc Taddei

British Music for Viola and Orchestra

Ralph Vaughan Williams · Herbert Howells · William Walton · York Bowen

In his foreword to *An Anthology of British Viola Players* (Comus Edition, 1997), Yehudi Menuhin observed that 'the greatest string players I have known have always preferred the viola in the quartet to all other voices ... I think it is a tribute to the British character that seeks the middle voice, the warm voice which bridges the more extrovert violin with the ground bass.' Britain has produced several viola players of international stature, none more dedicated to promoting the cause of the instrument than the renowned virtuoso Lionel Tertis (1876–1975). Re-establishing the viola as a bona fide solo instrument virtually single-handed, Tertis premiered three of the works by British composers presented here and was the dedicatee of the fourth.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) produced fully fledged concertos for piano, violin, oboe and tuba as well as several works featuring instruments in important concertante roles, including *Flos Campi*, for viola, small orchestra and choir. If this is one of the composer's most rapturous inspirations, his other work featuring the viola as the main protagonist reflects his more convivial side. The *Suite* for viola and orchestra (1934) was written for Lionel Tertis, who premiered it with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent at the Queen's Hall, London on 12 November 1934. The score's eight short genre pieces are divided into three groups which may be performed complete or individually. The first group, featured here, opens with a *Prelude* in C major that dispenses with violins but makes effective use of flute and bassoon. A more animated, rustic episode provides contrast and makes a brief reappearance before the close. Alternating 4/4 and 5/4 phrases, the beautiful central *Carol* withholds the brass and offers characteristically poetic writing for strings, which are muted throughout. The spirited closing *Christmas Dance* indulges in festive merrymaking with triangle taps adding sparkle to the music's joyful tintinnabulations before a last-minute tumble to the finishing line. Though this tuneful and elegantly crafted score is palpably influenced

by the composer's love of folk music, the material is all original.

Herbert Howells (1892–1983) wrote his *Elegy* for solo viola, string quartet and string orchestra in 1917 in memory of viola scholar and composer Francis Purcell Warren, a fellow student at the Royal College of Music. Warren was killed in action at Mons on 3 March 1916 and Howells wrote his *Elegy* soon after. Originally conceived as the central movement of a suite for strings, it was first played at a Royal College concert on 13 July 1917 and received its public premiere by the London Symphony Orchestra at a Mons Memorial Concert of music by living English composers conducted by Sir Hugh Allen in the Royal Albert Hall on 17 December 1917. The opening viola solo, a somberly reflective threnody, initiates a work of sweeping nobility pervaded by sorrow and regret. The music builds to an impassioned climax and ends in a consoling, radiant C major epilogue. The intermittent episodes scored for string quartet suggest glimpses of the private face of grief behind the heartfelt public tribute.

William Walton (1902–1983) wrote four concertante works of which the finest is arguably his *Viola Concerto*, composed during 1928–29 for Lionel Tertis at the suggestion of Sir Thomas Beecham. As soon as it was completed Walton sent the score to its dedicatee who rejected it by return of post, much to the composer's disappointment. The first performance of the concerto took place at a Promenade Concert at Queen's Hall on 3 October 1929, with the composer conducting the Henry Wood Symphony Orchestra and the German composer and violist Paul Hindemith playing the solo part. Tertis attended the premiere and instantly realised his error in dismissing the score. He subsequently performed the piece many times, notably at the International Festival of Contemporary Music at Liège on 4 September 1930, with the composer again on the rostrum.

In 1961 Walton re-scored the work, reducing the original triple woodwind to double, omitting one trumpet and eliminating the tuba altogether. He did, however, add

a harp to enrich the texture. The revised version was premiered at the Royal Festival Hall, London on 18 January 1962, with soloist John Coulling and the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Malcolm Sargent.

In the opening *Andante comodo*, Walton exploits the instrument's wistful nature as well as tapping into its capacity for lyrical warmth. The viola presents the nostalgic main theme, supported by a chamber-like instrumentation that serves notice of the composer's scrupulous attention to matters of balance between soloist and orchestra in this concerto. A second idea, again launched by the soloist, grows naturally from its predecessor and maintains the spontaneous-sounding character of the music. Faster episodes intrude upon the soloist's reveries, including an extended span for orchestra alone, fired with Waltonian panache. Also notable is an accompanied cadenza launched by the soloist playing in two parts, vaulted over veiled timpani and shimmering lower strings. After a reprise of the main theme, now given to woodwind with viola counterpoint, the movement ends quietly.

In the mercurial central *Vivo, con molto preciso*, the composer explores the viola's capacity for nimble passagework while never losing sight of its essentially soulful character. This early example of a *scherzo* by Walton is laced with a typically piquant combination of delicacy and bite.

In the closing *Allegro moderato*, various thematic and emotional threads are drawn together in a cogent summing up of the concerto's character and concerns. A central fugue contains elements of all three of the movement's main ideas. The re-introduction of the principal idea from the opening *Andante* is deftly achieved in a compelling epilogue which remains one of Walton's most moving and eloquent inspirations.

The composer York Bowen (1884–1961) was also a concert pianist and partnered Lionel Tertis in many recitals. Together they premiered Bowen's two viola sonatas and a duet for viola and organ. In addition, Bowen's *Phantasy* quartet for four violas was written for Tertis and three of his students. Perhaps Bowen's finest work for the instrument

was his *Viola Concerto in C minor* (1907), also written for Tertis. The first performance took place at a Philharmonic Society concert on 26 March 1908 at the Queen's Hall, London with the dedicatee as soloist, conducted by Landon Ronald. The work was enthusiastically received by the public and press alike and Tertis gave several other performances, including the American premiere in Chicago. This substantial, directly communicative piece is written in a late-Romantic style for large orchestral forces, including three flutes (third doubling piccolo), bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, triangle, glockenspiel), harp and strings.

After an opening woodwind flourish, the viola introduces the dramatic C minor main theme of the *Allegro assai* first movement. A transitional passage for orchestra is followed by the second subject, an expressive melody in D major delicately accompanied by woodwind, brass and harp. The extended development section contains a turbulent passage for full orchestra and an ear-catching, prolonged sequence in octaves for the soloist. The initial C minor theme reappears but the movement ends with the eloquent second subject.

A judiciously scored orchestral introduction launches the central *Andante cantabile*, which presents several related, songlike ideas, one of which has a playful, folkish character. Bowen's writing for flute and horn is particularly delightful in this relaxed, intermezzo-like utterance that offers a satisfying contrast to the two energetic outer movements.

Marked *Allegro scherzando*, the lively finale re-establishes the virtuosic aspects of Bowen's solo writing. The orchestral accompaniment is initially light, even skittish, but the movement gains intensity as it proceeds. The cadenza in this recording is provided by the soloist Helen Callus and incorporates ideas from each of the three movements. After this, the opening movement's first subject is recalled and the work is rounded off by a bravura coda featuring trills, arpeggiated figures and double-stopping in its pyrotechnical display.

Paul Conway

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Stephen A'Court

The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) is New Zealand's national orchestra. Founded in 1946, it is one of the world's oldest national symphony orchestras. Today, the NZSO is recognised as an outstanding orchestra of international stature with a reputation for artistic excellence that attracts many of the world's leading conductors and soloists. Each year the NZSO performs more than 100 concerts in more than 30 different communities across New Zealand, to audiences in excess of 100,000 people. In addition, the orchestra's performances can be heard on Radio New Zealand concert broadcasts, film soundtracks and commercial recordings. In 2016, the NZSO was nominated for Best Orchestral Performance at the prestigious GRAMMY® Awards. The NZSO offers something for everyone, including an inspiring Masterworks series conducted by music director, Edo de Waart, as well as nurturing New Zealand's best young musical talent through their Community and Education programmes and the NZSO National Youth Orchestra. www.nzso.co.nz

Marc Taddei



Photo: Becky Nunes

Marc Taddei is the music director of Orchestra Wellington in New Zealand and the Vallejo Symphony in the United States. Previously, he was the music director of the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra in New Zealand. As a guest artist, he has conducted the Sydney, Melbourne, Queensland, Tasmanian, and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras, Orchestra Victoria, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Auckland Philharmonia and the Silesian State Opera in the Czech Republic. In the US, he has conducted the Louisiana Philharmonic, the Richmond, Oregon, Fort Worth, New Haven, Eugene and the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestras. Artists that he has collaborated with include Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Anne Sofie von Otter, Angela Brown, Julian Lloyd Webber, Horacio Gutiérrez, Simon O'Neill, Joanna MacGregor and Joshua Redman. His discography includes 30 recordings.

Helen Callus



Photo: Mark Robert Halper

Hailed as 'one of the world's greatest violists' (*American Record Guide*), Helen Callus continues to captivate audiences with her lyrical tone, technical command, and profound artistry. She is a sought-after recitalist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist. She has performed with such world-class ensembles as the Tokyo and Juilliard String Quartets, the BBC Concert Orchestra, and delighted audiences around the world, in Russia, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and throughout the US. She is an award-winning recording artist and her seven releases have been met with the highest critical acclaim. Callus is currently professor of viola at the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She has given over a hundred masterclasses at many of the world's leading schools of music and also served as the first female president of the American Viola Society. For more information, please visit www.helencallus.com.

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The 'warm voice' of the viola has long been associated with pioneering British performers such as Lionel Tertis, for whom Vaughan Williams wrote his tuneful and elegantly crafted *Suite*. Tertis famously rejected the score of Walton's *Viola Concerto*, but instantly regretted his decision on hearing its lyrical warmth and piquant blend of delicacy and bite at the premiere performed by Paul Hindemith. Howells's sombre but noble *Elegy* is a memorial for a student colleague killed in action during WWI. Helen Callus 'plays with sumptuous tone matched by flawless intonation' (*Gramophone*).

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Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958):	
Suite for viola and orchestra (1934)	7:55
❶ No. 1. Prelude – Allegro moderato	3:07
❷ No. 2. Carol – Andante con moto	3:00
❸ No. 3. Christmas Dance – Allegro	1:44
❹ Herbert Howells (1892–1983):	
Elegy for viola, string quartet and string orchestra, Op. 15 (1917)	10:33
William Walton (1902–1983):	
Viola Concerto in A minor (1929, rev. 1961)	27:27
❺ I. Andante comodo	8:53
❻ II. Vivo, con molto preciso	4:35
❼ III. Allegro moderato	13:51
York Bowen (1884–1961): Viola Concerto in C minor, Op. 25 (1907)	32:00
❽ I. Allegro assai	13:20
❾ II. Andante cantabile	10:14
❿ III. Allegro scherzando (cadenza by Helen Callus)	8:18

Helen Callus, Viola

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • Marc Taddei

String Quartet ❹: Vesa-Matti Leppanen, Violin I • David Gilling, Violin II

Vyvyan Yendoll, Viola • David Chickering, Cello

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