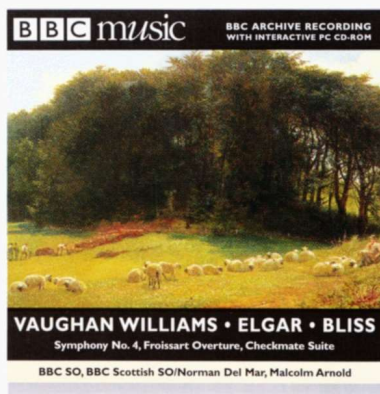


# THIS MONTH'S CD

## YOUR TRACK-BY-TRACK LISTENING GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S COVER CD



FROM THE VICTORIAN GRANDEUR OF ELGAR'S CHIVALRIC CONCERT overture to Vaughan Williams's darkly powerful Symphony, via Bliss's symbol-laden ballet suite, our cover CD this month shows the richness of British music composed between the end of the last century and the Thirties. **MARTIN COTTON** introduces these three contrasting works, in performances conducted by two of the most respected figures in British music, Norman Del Mar and Malcolm Arnold

# From chivalry to shock



**EDWARD ELGAR**  
(1857-1934)

### FROISSART – CONCERT OVERTURE, OP. 19

**E**LGAR COMPOSED "FROISSART" in 1890 in response to a commission from the Worcester Festival. It's the first of his works that bears the true Elgarian stamp, and carries a motto from Keats – 'When chivalry lifted up her lance on high' – that gives a good idea of the sentiment behind the music.

**I** A string flourish and a fanfare in the brass quickly lead into the noble first theme (0:31). A sinister march in the minor follows (0:57), with an associated restless theme first presented by the violins and cellos (1:09), before the fanfare reappears, giving way to a new idea (2:00), yearning and chromatic. The first theme returns (2:55) to round off this part of the

overture, and leads into a gentler, extended, second section with a theme introduced by the clarinet (4:03). Now Elgar has displayed all his musical material, he deploys it in varied dress and combinations in the development section (5:52), culminating in a return to the opening flourish of the whole work (11:47) and a triumphant return of the first theme (11:57) before an acceleration to the finish.



**ARTHUR BLISS**  
(1891-1973)

### CHECKMATE – SUITE

**B**LISS BEGAN HIS COMPOSING career as an *enfant terrible*, influenced by the sounds of Paris in the Twenties and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. By the Thirties, his early love of Elgar's music had re-emerged, and combined with this continental leaning to create a distinctive style. *Checkmate* was

premiered by the Vic-Wells Ballet on tour in Paris in 1937.

**2 Prologue – The Players** After a brooding opening, the curtain rises to reveal two chess players: one clothed in gold (1:30) representing love, and the other in black (2:01) representing death.

**3 Dance of the Red Pawns** The scene then shifts to the chessboard itself, where the red pieces are assembling. The red pawns are light-hearted pages, and their short dance is lively and full of playful cross-rhythms.

**4 Dance of the Four Knights** First the two red knights leap on to the board and dance to an acrobatic theme. They are followed by the two black knights (0:44), whom they challenge to a display of daring (1:10), and the first red knight surpasses them all (1:41). The red pawns dance with the knights (1:59), but this is interrupted by the approach of the black queen (3:41).

**5 Entry of the Black Queen** The most dangerous piece on the board enters to a sinuous, wide-ranging clarinet theme. As she

acknowledges the presence of the red knights, flute and oboe exchange phrases (1:54); the first red knight is fascinated by her and follows her across the board (2:40). She throws him a rose (3:57) before leaving the stage with her two black knights.

**6 The Red Knight's Mazurka** An exuberant solo for the first red knight after his encounter with the black queen.

**7 Ceremony of the Red Bishops** A complete change of mood, as the red bishops enter to music of a religious cut, and bless the kneeling knights (1:01) about to go into battle.

**8 Finale – Checkmate** The suite now jumps to the end-game, with the old and feeble red king the only red piece left on the board. The final onslaught of the black pieces begins to fast and furious music, and the red king is gradually forced back to the steps of his throne (1:47), where he has a brief vision of himself as a young and strong ruler (2:30). The troops waver, but the black queen strikes the red king with her spear (3:03), and he falls to the ground (3:10).





**RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**  
(1872-1958)

# **SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN F MINOR**

I don't know if I like it, but it's what I meant.' This was the composer's own comment on this symphony after the rehearsals for its first performance in April 1935. It certainly came as a shock to those who had neatly pigeon-holed Vaughan Williams as an English pastoral composer, though he always denied that the violence of the work was connected with the worsening world situation of the time. Whatever the external motivation, this symphony is an extraordinarily tightly constructed piece, with not a note wasted.

**9 Allegro** The symphony begins with a grinding dissonance, before exposing two short motifs that will recur throughout the work. The first – let's call it V – is simply four notes which turn tightly on themselves (0:07); the second (W) fans apart as the treble ascends by fourths and thirds, and the bass descends. The second group begins in a modal D minor, with pulsing chords (0:52), and a restless theme in octaves in the strings (1:02), which reaches a climax (2:06) and leads into the second theme of the second group (2:10): over an ostinato, a theme derived from V gradually breaks free and extends over a wider range. The development (3:36) is short and concerned almost entirely with V. Similarly the recapitulation (4:35) is severely truncated – we've reached the second group by 4:50, and repose comes only with the second theme of that group (6:00) transformed on muted violas, and with the ostinato reworked as a descant in the violins (6:10)

**10 Andante moderato** Two statements of W act as an intro-

## **THE PERFORMERS ON THIS MONTH'S CD**



**Malcolm Arnold** is a composer and conductor. He was born in Northampton in 1921 and was for a

time first trumpet in the LPO. His compositions include film scores, symphonies and concertos. He conducted many first performances of his own works, and has frequently conducted the BBC orchestras. His symphonies are being recorded by Chandos, Conifer and Naxos.



**Norman Del Mar** was born in London in 1919. In a long career, he held conducting posts with

Britten's English Opera Group, the BBC Scottish Orchestra, the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, and with orchestras in Sweden and Denmark. He was renowned as the principal interpreter of British music of his generation, and was also the author of a number of books about music. Del Mar died in 1994.

The **BBC Symphony Orchestra** was founded in 1930 under Adrian Boult as the flagship orchestra of the BBC. It has long had a strong commitment to 20th-century music, and visiting composers who have conducted British premieres of their works with the orchestra include Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Strauss and Prokofiev. The orchestra's chief conductors have included Pierre Boulez, Colin Davis, Gennady Rozhdestvensky and John Pritchard, and Andrew Davis is the current chief conductor. The orchestra provides the backbone of the yearly Proms seasons.

The **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** was Scotland's first full-time professional orchestra, founded in 1935. It was one of the first British orchestras to promote the music of Sibelius and has performed at the Edinburgh Festival since its earliest years. Its past conductors have included Norman Del Mar, Christopher Seaman and Jerzy Maksymiuk, and the orchestra's present chief conductor is Osmo Vänskä. It regularly tours Scotland.

duction, then a pizzicato ostinato begins in the bass (0:27) and a theme creeps in on the violins (0:39), is taken in a different direction by the wind (1:43), and yet again by the strings (2:29). W reappears at the first climax (3:16), and then a new theme is heard from the flute (4:00). It is little more than a codetta, and the development quickly follows (4:42). As in the first movement, it is fairly brief, and, when it reaches its climax, the recapitulation emerges (6:14) with descants. The flute codetta is extended into a full-blown coda (8:27), complete with cadenza, and V makes its only appearance in this movement, on muted brass (8:55). The final note of the flute is inconclusive – a change which Vaughan Williams made 20 years after the first performance.

ment. This is a grotesque and grim joke, as scherzos go, and the rhythmically jerky accompaniment (0:29) to the second theme (0:47) does nothing to settle things. These two themes are repeated before the trio – yet another version of W – is led off by the tuba (2:31). Not unexpectedly, the recapitulation is truncated, with the first theme (3:34), the second theme (4:13) and a brief snatch of the trio (4:31) leading via a ghostly bridge passage (4:44) to the finale. V and W both appear here, as does a reminiscence of the opening bars of the whole symphony (5:11), and the volume and tension increase, until...

### **12 Finale con epilogo fugato**

The main theme is short, and related to the flute coda from the second movement, though here it is in a strong march rhythm. Almost directly, Vaughan Williams establishes what he called an 'oompah' bass, over which subsequent material in the first group unfolds: another of those themes

which turns back to the same note (0:22) and something more angry, but still not extended (0:36). The second group of themes is sunnier (1:13), and has a pendant in the brass which unexpectedly bounces into triple time (1:41). The main theme returns (1:50), but with jazzy rhythmic syncopations, and the second and third themes from the first group wind down towards one of the most magical and unexpected moments in the whole Symphony: a memory of the slow ending of the first movement on muted strings (2:56). Sinister rumblings of W and V (4:13) mount in tension to the recapitulation (4:42) which, again, is tightened, before the start of the fugal epilogue. All through the Symphony, Vaughan Williams has treated his themes contrapuntally, but here he really goes to town. The epilogue is based on our old friend V (6:17), but all the other themes from this movement turn up, culminating in the main theme (8:22), which, in combination with V, leads back into a restatement of the very opening of the symphony (8:42), a last statement of W, five shakes of the fist, and a final defiant blow. ■

## **FURTHER LISTENING**

**ELCAR: FROISSART; COCKAIGNE; POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE MARCHES**  
Philharmonia Orchestra, New Philharmonia Orchestra/John Barbirolli  
EMI CDM 5 66323 2 ££

**ELCAR: FROISSART; ENIGMA VARIATIONS; CELLO CONCERTO**  
Robert Cohen (cello); RPO/Charles Mackerras  
Argo 436 545-2 £££

**BLISS: CHECKMATE - SUITE; A COLOUR SYMPHONY**  
Ulster Orchestra/Vernon Handley  
Chandos CHAN 8503 £££

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: SYMPHONIES NOS 4 & 5**  
BBC SO/Ralph Vaughan Williams; Hallé Orchestra/John Barbirolli  
Dutton Laboratories CDAX 8011 £££

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: SYMPHONIES NOS 3 & 4; FANTASIA ON GREENSLEEVES**  
Linda Hohenfeld (soprano); Philharmonia Orchestra/Leonard Slatkin  
RCA 09026 61194 2 £££