Walton

Violin Concerto
Variations on a theme by Hindemith
Partita for orchestra
Spitfire Prelude and Fugue

Anthony Marwood
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Martyn Brabbins
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## SIR WILLIAM WALTON
(1902–1983)

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### Performers

**ANTHONY MARWOOD** violin  
**BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**LAURA SAMUEL** leader  
**MARTYN BRABBINS** conductor
OF THOSE BRITISH COMPOSERS who followed the examples of Parry (born in 1847), Stanford (1852) and Elgar (1857) in establishing a national musical identity, none made a greater or more lasting impact as a young man than William Walton. A remarkable aspect of his early success was that he was almost entirely self-taught; he never studied at music college (he gained a scholarship to Oxford University at sixteen, but failed to complete his degree), nor was he a performing musician (other than conducting his own music).

It was Parry who, in 1918 (the last year of his life), commended the sixteen-year-old’s piano quartet with the words ‘keep an eye on him’. On coming down from university, his education incomplete, Walton was taken up by the Sitwell siblings, moving to London and cohabiting with them and thereby finding himself at the epicentre of immediate post-War art. Walton thus unwittingly became one of his generation’s ‘Bright Young Things’, which the Sitwells in many ways personified: intent upon establishing themselves, they hoped their adopted family member would provide the musical equivalent to their literary aspiration.

In Façade for reciter and chamber ensemble (1922), Edith Sitwell and William cocked several snooks at Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire (1914, given in London in 1920 under Darius Milhaud), but for Walton the interest went deeper. In a new string quartet completed the same year he embraced the Austrian’s atonality and combined it with his own character. Submitted for the first International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Salzburg in 1923, examination of the score caused Hermann Scherchen to exclaim: ‘Who is this William Walton?’

The quartet so impressed Alban Berg that he took Walton to meet Schoenberg (this before Façade had been performed in public). Parry had been right, but Walton abandoned the atonal path. He was to withdraw the string quartet (though not the earlier piano quartet, which was published in 1924 after having been mislaid for a few years). Walton had met other significant figures at the Salzburg premiere of the string quartet, including the composer, conductor, violinist and violist Paul Hindemith, then twenty-eight, seven years Walton’s senior, their first meeting beginning a forty-year friendship.

In withdrawing the string quartet, Walton returned to the roots exemplified in the piano quartet: a command of rhythmic pulse over quite long stretches, a harmonic knowledge unafraid to embrace the non-traditional for expressive purposes, and an inherent lyricism that the more acerbic string quartet hid. Clearly, Walton was a name to watch, and not from Parry’s urging, or from the interest of Berg, Schoenberg, Scherchen or Hindemith. Walton in 1926 was only twenty-four when his brilliant overture Portsmouth Point made a considerable impression. Its first performance was in Zürich under Volkmar Andreae and was followed by one in London under Eugène Goossens. Two years later, Walton’s Sinfonia concertante for piano and orchestra was premiered in London at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert; York Bowen was the soloist, with Ernest Ansermet conducting.

Eugène Goossens (Sir Thomas Beecham’s one-time protégé) introduced Walton to Beecham, who suggested he write a viola concerto for Lionel Tertis, a challenge that tapped Walton’s natural lyricism. Tertis, however, rejected the concerto (Hindemith gave the premiere), yet soon regretted his haste, becoming a much-admired performer of the work many regard as the greatest viola concerto ever written.

Walton was now someone to encourage—as the newly constituted BBC underlined in commissioning the choral work which was to become the oratorio Belshazzar’s Feast, premiered under Malcolm Sargent at the 1931 Leeds Festival. Beecham took a hand in this, also, suggesting that Walton ‘throw in a couple of brass bands’ in the heftiest passages—which he did. The impact of Belshazzar’s Feast,
coming hard on the heels of the viola concerto, made the news that Walton was working on a symphony an enticing prospect, but as the symphony was not ready for the advertised premiere Walton permitted its three completed movements to be performed in December 1934 by the LSO under Hamilton Harty.

In the USA, on Christmas Eve 1934, Jascha Heifetz recorded Sibelius’s violin concerto in fractious sessions with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski. This was the only time violinist and conductor ever met, a fraught occasion witnessed by Sergei Rachmaninov who was waiting patiently to record his new *Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini* after the Sibelius. Heifetz forbade release of the concerto recording with Stokowski, and, almost a year later, on 26 November 1935, he re-recorded the work in London with Beecham and the LPO. By that time, Walton’s major works had been heard several times in America—Stokowski had given three performances of *Belshazzar’s Feast* in Philadelphia in January 1934.

The concert news in London in November 1935 was dominated by the first complete performance of Walton’s symphony; Harty conducted the now-complete four-movement work with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, three weeks before Heifetz’s Sibelius sessions with Beecham. Whilst in London, Heifetz took Walton to lunch at the old Berkeley Hotel in Mayfair, a restaurant noted for its hand-painted wallpaper. It was a popular eating-place for musicians (here, dining in the summer of 1933, Elgar had told Fred Gaisberg and Harriet Cohen that his Symphony No 3 was ‘finished’).

Over lunch, Heifetz commissioned a violin concerto from Walton—a remarkable tribute to the composer’s stature at that time. Walton was to take his time over the concerto, not beginning serious work on it until early 1938, and much of it was written in Italy where he was convalescing after a hernia operation.

The structure of the *Violin Concerto in B minor* follows that of the earlier viola concerto (in turn, influenced by Prokofiev’s first violin concerto—Walton had been present at the British premiere by Szigeti in 1925) and there is also a subtle quote in the finale from the Sibelius concerto Heifetz had been recording with Beecham when he commissioned it.

The violin concerto shows Walton at the height of his powers: the solo part, as edited by Heifetz, could be by no other composer and the orchestration is masterly. Heifetz was thrilled by the work and premiered it in Cleveland with Artur Rodziński on 7 December 1939. But by then war had broken out in Europe and Walton could not be present; he conducted the British premiere in November 1941 with Henry Holst as soloist. Two years later he slightly revised the orchestration.

The immediacy of impact to be found in Walton’s music—its directness of utterance, clear melodic and emotional appeal, as well as dramatic character—was fully exhibited in the concertos, *Belshazzar’s Feast* and the symphony, and soon led to him being invited to write film music; sound had first become part of film only in the late 1920s. Walton at once showed his mettle in ‘Escape me never’ (1934), and eventually wrote fourteen film scores, proving himself to be a master of the genre.

The success of the 1942 film ‘The first of the few’—dramatizing the race to design and construct the Supermarine Spitfire fighter aircraft prior to the outbreak of war and the RAF’s success during the 1940/1 Blitz—was due in no small part to Walton’s music, and this encouraged him to fashion from his score a patriotic concert piece, in much the same characteristic vein as his 1937 coronation march *Crown Imperial*. The *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* was premiered in Liverpool in January 1943, in an all-Walton concert he conducted. The significance of the premiere was not lost on those who, forty-odd years before, had
witnessed the first performances of Elgar’s first two *Pomp and Circumstance* marches in the same hall.

The prelude emanates from the film’s title music, the fugue accompanying the construction of the prototype Spitfire and evoking, as Mark Doran writes, ‘the “one part added to another part, added to another part …” aspect of an aircraft’s assembly … [as well as] depicting the single-minded pursuit of a complex task’. As with *Crown Imperial*, the *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* exhibits Walton’s ‘popular’ touch. The piece, with connotations of wartime victory, was championed in America by Stokowski, who conducted three performances in New York. Also in the United States, for its fiftieth anniversary in 1940, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra had commissioned Walton’s comedy overture *Scapino*, soon recorded by the orchestra under its conductor Frederick Stock. 1941 saw the violin concerto recorded for the first time by Heifetz with the Cincinnati Symphony under Eugène Goossens. Another American-based conductor, George Szell, was a long-time admirer of Walton—having given the Australian premiere of the Symphony in 1940—and in Cleveland (where he had inherited Artur Rodziński’s baton from Erich Leinsdorf in 1946) Szell’s later recordings of Walton’s music made a considerable impact.

For their fortieth anniversary, in 1958, the Cleveland Orchestra commissioned a new work from Walton. The resultant *Partita for orchestra*, intended to ‘be enjoyed straight off’ as Walton explained, is in three movements, the titles of which reinforce the composer’s love of the Mediterranean (where, on the island of Ischia, he eventually made his home after his whirlwind marriage in 1949).

Walton’s *Partita* is a virtuosic and wide-ranging score, from the dazzling tuttis in the first movement and finale to the languorous central siciliana—opening with a duet for oboe and viola before expanding into one of the composer’s finest soundscapes with virtually pointilliste instrumentation. The brilliance of the outer movements crowns the *Partita*’s finale with a memorable tune on first trumpet, releasing the tension and heralding the closing section in a mood of triumphant good humour, the E major ending of the *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* infusing the *Partita* throughout.

Following the premiere of Walton’s large-scale opera *Troilus and Cressida* at Covent Garden in 1954, the *Partita* was one of several orchestral works written between 1956 and 1963: the *Johannesburg Festival Overture*, the cello concerto, the second symphony and the *Variations on a theme of Hindemith*. 
The variations were commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society, marking their 150th anniversary in 1963. The work fused a number of strands and formed one of Walton’s finest orchestral scores, but one whose subtleties doubtless led to it being misunderstood when it appeared, the composer’s familiar language in certain quarters now being considered somewhat passé.

The forty-year friendship between Walton and Hindemith culminated in this deeply felt homage from one great composer to another, made more poignant as Hindemith was to die suddenly at the very end of 1963, yet not before he had heard the variations and planned to conduct the work, which is dedicated to him and his wife.

The theme comes from the opening passage, including harmony, of the slow movement of Hindemith’s 1940 cello concerto. The resultant variations form arguably Walton’s most refined masterpiece, its expression not invariably discernible on the surface. The mastery demonstrated throughout is deeply impressive: here is control of structure, of pace, of emotional content, and an artistic maturity of expression without a bar’s exaggeration.

Hindemith’s theme is a note-row (eleven notes, the ‘missing’ twelfth—E flat—is heard in passing). Although nine variations are specified, the work has eleven continuous sections (including finale and coda) after the opening theme, of which the seventh, lento, quotes directly from Hindemith’s opera *Mathis der Maler*. Walton appears at times to absorb Hindemith’s own distinctive language before reverting to his own—implying an unspoken conversation between friends. Nothing is overdone, each distinctive variation naturally following from what preceded it: a profound tribute indeed to a lifetime colleague and to the Royal Philharmonic Society of London. Not every commissioned work results in a masterpiece, but one was certainly forthcoming on this occasion.
Anthony Marwood enjoys a multi-faceted international career as soloist, director and chamber musician. The youngest of four siblings, he enjoyed music and drama equally as a child, but the connection to the violin proved strongest; he studied with Emanuel Hurwitz at the Royal Academy of Music, David Takeno at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and took lessons with Sándor Végh at the International Musicians Seminar at Prussia Cove, Cornwall.

A natural collaborator, Anthony has created projects with musicians from different genres, actors and dancers, most notably when he acted the title role of Stravinsky’s *A Soldier’s Tale* on two national tours with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. He is Principal Artistic Partner of Les Violons du Roy in Québec and, for the 2016/17 season, Artist in Residence at the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra. His many solo appearances around the world include those with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Boston Symphony, St Louis Symphony, LA Philharmonic, Australian Chamber and Sydney Symphony orchestras, the Mariinsky and Musica Viva Chamber orchestras in Russia, Tapiola Sinfonietta in Finland, Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Aurora Orchestra, the BBC orchestras and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He was Artistic Director of the Irish Chamber Orchestra for five years.

He enjoys playing a very broad repertoire, and champions new works written for him by Thomas Adès, Sally Beamish, Steve Mackey, Samuel Adams and Pēteris Vasks. Anthony was honoured with the Instrumentalist Award from the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2006. He is Artistic Director of the Peasmarsh Chamber Music Festival in East Sussex, together with Richard Lester from the former Florestan Trio, a group which enjoyed a flourishing recording and performing career until it disbanded in 2012.

Anthony plays on a 1736 Carlo Bergonzi, bought by a syndicate of purchasers. His hands were featured in sculptress Nicole Farhi’s 2016 exhibition in London. Anthony lives in an isolated cottage near Rye, Sussex, and wishes it were possible to have a dog. On the plus side, he is lucky to have wonderful friends around the world with whom he stays on his travels, especially in Vermont, Melbourne and Sydney. He draws inspiration from Cape Town, where he tries to spend at least a month every year. Having initially received the friendliest ever rejection letter from the founder of Hyperion Records, Ted Perry, he has gone on to make numerous recordings for the company, both as soloist and chamber musician: this recording is his fiftieth.
British conductor Martyn Brabbins is known for his affinity with music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to which he brings a Romantic sensibility, an unerring sense of pace and an extraordinary ear for detail. He has conducted hundreds of world premieres by leading international composers, has championed British music at home and abroad, and has made over 120 recordings, including over fifty albums for Hyperion. After studying composition in London and then conducting with Ilya Musin in Leningrad, he won first prize at the 1988 Leeds Conductors’ Competition. Since then he has become a frequent guest with leading orchestras around the world, and has held a succession of titles, notably Associate Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (1994–2005), Principal Guest of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic (2009–2015) and Chief Conductor of the Nagoya Philharmonic (2012–2016), remaining closely associated with all three.

Martyn was appointed Music Director of English National Opera in 2016. He has conducted many of the world’s leading orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and La Scala Milan, and is a favourite of the BBC Proms, where in 2014 he shared the podium with Elder, Norrington and Gardner conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the First Night. He is also a regular visitor to the opera houses of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Lyon and Frankfurt, and made his Bavarian State Opera debut in 2013.

Martyn Brabbins is an inspirational force in British music, and has contributed significantly over the years, conducting the major UK orchestras and appearing at the major British festivals on many occasions. He was Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Festival of Music from 2005 to 2007, and is currently Music Director to the Huddersfield Choral Society, with whom he has had a long association—one of the many ways in which he supports both professional and amateur music-making at the highest level in the United Kingdom. He is a leading advocate of British composers, and an inspiration to young conductors in his annual course at the St Magnus Festival on Orkney and in his position as Visiting Professor of Conducting at the Royal College of Music.
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

violin 1  Laura Samuel, Kanako Ito, Cheryl Crockett1,2, Jane Mackenzie, Jane Hainey, Joanna Sutherland, Alastair Savage,
        Olivier Lemoine, Gent Kocho1,2, Amy Cardigan, Laura Ghigo1,2, Jane Lemoine, Catherine James1,2,
        Jacqueline Speirs1,2, Justine Watts3,4, Peter Isaacs3,4, Emily MacPherson3,4, Gillian Risi3,4, Susan Henderson3,4

violin 2  Greg Lawson, Lise Aferiat1,2, Liza Johnson1,2, Elizabeth Flack, Julia Norton, Alex Gascoine, Janis Walton,
        Bernard Docherty, Julia Carpenter, Barbara Downie1,2, Alice Rickards, Ben Norris1,2, Simon Gilks3,4,
        Catherine James3,4, Laura Ghigo3,4, Katie Hull3,4

viola    Andrew Berridge1,2, Mark Braithwaite1,2, Fiona Robertson, Alice Batty, Jessica Tickle1,2, Rik Evans, Martin Wiggins,
        Emma Peebles1,2, Georgia Boyd, Christine Anderson1,2, Scott Dickinson3,4, Jacqui Penfold3,4, Jennifer Edwards3,4,
        Mary Ward3,4, Liam Brolly3,4

cello    Alison Lawrence, Naomi Boole-Masterson1,2, Sonia Cromarty1,2, Harold Harris, Gill De Groote, Anne Brincourt,
        Amanda Shearman, Anthony Sayer1,2, Martin Storey3,4, Tom Rathbone3,4, Sharon Mollo3,4

double bass  Iain Crawford, John Van Lierop, Derek Hill, Jeremy Ward, Paul Speirs, Lynette Eaton1,2, Nicholas Bayley3,4

flute     Harry Winstanley1,2, Rosemary Lock, Ewan Robertson1,2, Yvonne Paterson3,4

oboë      Stella McCracken, Amy Turner2, James Horan1,2,3, Amy McKean3,4

clarinet  Yann Ghiro, Barry Deacon, Jenny Stephenson2, Simon Butterworth3

bassoon   Julian Roberts, Graeme Brown, Peter Wesley2,3

born      Alec Frank-Gemmill1,2, Jeremy Bushell, Etienne Cutajar, Ian Smith1,2, Fergus Kerr2, David Flack3,4,
        Stephanie Jones3,4, Jamie Shield3

trumpet   Mark O’Keeffe, Eric Dunlea, Hedley Benson2,3, Robert Baxter3

trumpetbone  Andrew Cole1,2, Kriss Garfitt1,2, Simon Johnson3,4, Chris Mansfield3,4, Rui Pedro Alves3,4

bass trombone  Alan Mathison

tuba      Andrew Duncan2,3,4

timpani  Gordon Rigby

percussion  Dave Lyons, Robert Purse1,2,4, Christopher Edwards2, Scott Mackenzie2, Colin Hyson2, Heather Corbett3,4,
        Martin Willis3,4, Stuart Semple4

baritone  Helen Thomson  celesta  Julia Lynch2
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Hindemith Variations & Spitfire Prelude recorded in City Halls, Candleriggs, Glasgow, on 11 & 12 September 2013
Recording Engineer GRAEME TAYLOR
Recording Producer ANDREW TRINICK

Violin Concerto & Partita recorded in City Halls, Candleriggs, Glasgow, on 26 & 27 April 2016
Recording Engineer SIMON EADON
Assistant Recording Engineer DAVE ROWELL
Recording Producer ANDREW KEENER
Executive Producer SIMON PERRY
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Front illustration: *Ill Omen, or Girl in the East Wind with Ravens Passing the Moon* (1893)
by Frances Macdonald (1874–1921)

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