

SIR ARTHUR BLISS (1891–1975)

Master of the Queen's Musick. C.H. . K.C.V.O.

by Andrew Guyatt

Arthur Bliss was born in London on 2nd of August, 1891. He was educated at Rugby and later at Pembroke College, Cambridge, receiving his B.A. and Mus.Bac. in 1913. His first, pre-war attempts at musical composition were later withdrawn and Bliss acknowledged only those dating from 1918. Among the first of these were *Madame Noy*, *Rhapsody*, *Rout* and *Conversations* and from such seeds of what was thought to be scandalously avant-garde exploration grew the Bliss of the *Colour Symphony*, *Violin Concerto*, *Things to Come* and, of course, the great ballets.

In 1923 he left England for the United States and for two years lived in Santa Barbara, California. Here he met his future wife, Trudy Hoffmann, with whom he was to enjoy a long and happy marriage.

Shortly after his return to England Bliss wrote the orchestral *Hymn to Apollo* and the *Introduction and Allegro* and in 1939 he was commissioned to write a piano concerto for the New York World's Fair. The first performance was given there by the great Solomon, with Sir Adrian Boult directing the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra – a formidable combination and a resounding success.

From 1942 until 1944 he was the BBC's Director of Music. In 1950 he received a knighthood and three years later succeeded Sir Arnold Bax as Master of the Queen's Musick, discharging his duties with a remarkable aptness unique in the long history of this royal appointment.

To his various offices, including the Presidencies of the Performing Rights Society and the Composers' Guild of Great Britain, he devoted considerable time and energy and his services to music were suitably recognised when he was made K.C.V.O. in 1969 and Companion of Honour in 1971.

On Maundy Thursday, 1975, Bliss died of cancer. A memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey later in the same year and this very moving occasion was broadcast to the nation on BBC Radio 3, as befitted the man who had contributed so much to ceremonial music. Shortly afterwards Lord Britten also passed away and with the loss of the two elder statesmen of British music came the end of an era.

Bliss' art was English by nature and international in appeal. He created in a very personal way an important link between Elgarian lyricism and neoclassical ideals. In the ballet *Checkmate* he gave Britain its only really successful and lasting stage work.

Sir Arthur Bliss was tireless in his encouragement of younger musicians and composers, giving his time and resources fully to all who approached him for help. His consistently warm nature always reminded me of the nickname he gave himself when writing to his wife from abroad. It says much about his character . . . 'Marquis of Felicity'.



The following conversation between Sir Arthur and the author has been extracted from an informal interview which took place in 1973. It was originally published in a slightly different form in the journal of the Sir Thomas Beecham Society, *Le Grand Baton*, March 1977, no. 36, vol. 14.1.

CONVERSATIONS

It was on a beautiful spring afternoon that I called on Sir Arthur and Lady Bliss, at their home in St. John's Wood, London. We went up to his music room and talked for over an hour:

A.G. During the early part of this century Sir Edward Elgar took great interest in some of your compositions . . . How did you come to know him personally?

Sir A. He was one of my heroes when I was at Rugby. I sang in a performance of the **Dream of Gerontius** when I was sixteen or so, and being a "fan" I was determined to get to know the great man someday. So I sent him a letter full of hero worship asking for an autograph, and all I got back was a printed note saying that Sir Edward never gives his autographs except to intimate friends; which, as you can imagine, rather put me off.

However, later on I met him through some friends, and got to know him very well. I have behind me on the bookshelves a miniature score of his concert overture **Cockaigne**, which he sent to me when I was serving in France. It arrived just at the beginning of the Somme and it still has the mud of the trenches on it. Signed on it is "To Captain Bliss from Edward Elgar". I owe him my first chance to get any large scale public performance because in those days there was no chance at all for a young composer to hear his works. Compared with today a composer's lot was a very poor one. Elgar, being determined to modernise the Three Choirs Festival, invited Eugene Goossens, Herbert Howells and myself to write something for the festival; and what I wrote was the **Colour Symphony**.

It sounded very queer in the Cathedral in those days, but it gave me a chance to hear how a big work can sound, and also the opportunity to conduct it myself.

A.G. What gave you the idea of a symphony of colours?

Sir A. I am one of those composers who can't just sit down and write music straight out of my head. I need something to start me off. When Elgar said write whatever you like, I couldn't think of a thing. But quite by chance I was browsing along the bookshelves in a friend's house and came across a book on heraldry. It was while I was reading about the connection between colours and symbolism that the thought suddenly struck me: "why not place the four primary colours according to their symbolism, and write music to depict the different tones and ideas arising from it?" So out came the **Colour Symphony**; Blue: a slow movement, Purple: a ceremonial movement, Red: a fast movement and Green: a growing movement – hence the double fugue.

A.G. Who do you think was the greatest influence on your musical development?

Sir A. I think the most influential musical figure is undoubtedly Beethoven. I came across his music very early in life in his Sonatas, which I found enormously moving. And after that, Schubert. It was at my prep school that I was given

two volumes of his piano music by one of the more enlightened masters. I keep them constantly by me.

A.G. Your well-known ballet **Checkmate** is now a fairly regular concert piece, but I believe that the first performance was threatened by some backstage unrest?

Sir A. It was a marvellous performance with a really first rate cast; Constant Lambert conducted. It was at the great theatre of the Champs Elysees in Paris. It had a very good press write up, the critic of the Daily Mail saying that it would run for years . . . and it has! The threat was the ill-timed scene shifters' strike. When it came to setting up the great chessboard, there was nobody there to put it on! My great friend Bridges-Adams from the British Council came forward, called all the shifters together, ordered wine and meat to be brought in, and talked them round in a "Stratford atte-Bowe" French, mentioning the glories of the French and Voltaire. So after much quaffing of wine they came round to the idea that the ballet company should be supported, and up went the scenery!

A.G. Your opera **The Olympians** does not seem to be performed very often these days.

Sir A. Well you can read the story of the first performance in my book; (*As I remember*, Faber & Faber, 1970) in fact my librettist, J. B. Priestley, wrote about the disasters that we went through in order to get it on. It was given a concert performance at the Festival Hall two years ago. I have a tape of it, and it's good to hear it again. There's some good singing in it, and it has a good plot. One just has to wait I think. But going back to what you said earlier, I think that some of my best music is in the television opera **Tobias and the Angel**. It has a fascinating story, absolutely built for the television, and perhaps when they get over the stage difficulties it will come into the regular repertoire.

A.G. I believe that you are a friend of Sir Adrian Boult.

Sir A. Yes, I dedicated my **Colour Symphony** to him, and he gave the first performance of my **Music for Strings**; that was in Salzburg in 1935. he is a conductor of the highest eminence today. A friend of mine from HMV was saying that these present recordings made by him are going to be monuments in the history of the gramophone.

A.G. Whilst you were director of BBC music, were there any changes that you would like to have made?

Sir A. (laughing) Heaps, of course! You see we were scattered all over the country. I remember once that I went to some out-of-the-way cinema for a choral performance which had to be done at two o'clock in the morning in order that the sound might reach the Fiji Islands at lunchtime! The BBC thought that it would be an insult to record it and broadcast it later. What we did try to do was to keep as high a standard of good music of all nations as it was possible to do, whether it was Germany or whatever country that we might have been fighting at the time.

A.G. Why do you think that British Music and musicians have always been looked down upon by Europe and the other so-called centres of arts?

Sir A. Well, it might have been looked down upon once, but it certainly isn't now! Our singers are in demand in foreign opera houses, our orchestras tour abroad to full houses, and we have composers who are internationally well-known. You see, music is a world-wide advertisement for us, particularly the Proms -

universally recognised as the greatest music festival in the world. It attracts many people here; more and more countries are linking up to us by radio for some if not all of the broadcasts. So British Music is getting a good 'plugging'. But I don't think that the BBC are giving anywhere near as much time to British music as they ought; it seems to go in waves of enthusiasm for different styles, and certain types have never been very much in favour, I'm afraid.

A.G. I could not agree with you more about the waves of enthusiasm encountered at the BBC. Only this year (1973) we have had at least a dozen broadcasts of Vaughan Williams' **Sixth Symphony**, not that this is in itself a bad thing, but there has also been a lack of interest shown in other worthwhile composers.

Sir A. Yes, very true. And talking about Vaughan Williams, the first time that I saw him was in Cambridge. He was a great pioneer then, and a very impressive person in many ways. He lent me a room in his house at Cheyne Walk for nearly two years where I used to go and work. He had the room above me, and I could tell when he was working – a succession of slow chords would come down through the ceiling – I think he was making the final alterations to the **London Symphony**. I have forgotten what it was that I wrote whilst I was there, but it was fascinating to be in his ambience.

I sometimes went down to Brook Green to see Gustav Holst, taking with me one of my latest scores. I was about 27 at the time. He made comments that I have always remembered; they were more like lessons I suppose. His answer to my problems and questions were always straight to the point, just like his daughter Imogen; yes or no to everything, no humming or hawing, but a definite answer.

A.G. What do you personally feel about the modern approach to music, and the departure from melodic and romantic form, which has been the trend over the past few years?

Sir A. Firstly, I think that all music is romantic, in fact music is the romantic art *par excellence*. But I find a great deal of the experimental music of today rather silly in the sense that there is either audience participation, or that instrumentalists are required to play music which is not suited to their particular instruments, or that they are sometimes asked to play music *ad lib.* which can lead to extreme boredom. But, when it comes to modern composers who carefully notate their thoughts on paper, I think that we have some astonishingly good ones. Although he is not a living composer, the music of Charles Ives is surprising . . . I listened to a broadcast on the radio quite recently which included **Three Places in New England**. I hadn't the slightest idea who had written the music until it was announced later.

A.G. Aaron Copland is another American composer whose style is very individual.

Sir A. Yes, I like the music of Copland because it is so non-European! When listening to it I have the feeling of the space of America, and that again is what I look for in music; the composer is speaking to me about his impressions or emotions in the particular country he lives in. I don't like what I call 'esperanto' in music, and that is probably a criticism of the twelve note system; much of it sounds the same, though it may be written by quite different composers.

A.G. Keeping on the same track for a while, what do you feel about composers like Stockhausen?

Sir A. I think that listening to these works over the radio is no good at all. It is an

event; you've got to be there. It's rather like a revivalist meeting; there is no point sitting at home listening to it, as very often you get neither the point nor the excitement.

A.G. Although there is a great deal of this music performed on the radio, there seems to be a great public reaction against it. Music, they say, has become too academic for ordinary people to enjoy.

Sir A. Perhaps there is too much of it; it becomes very difficult for the public to distinguish between the real gold and the alloy. Part of the trouble with electronic music is that, to me, it lacks humanity. Some years ago the BBC gave about a quarter of an hour of electronic music at the Proms. The orchestra went away and left the equipment to play itself. Well, you know the Proms' audiences, they will clap pleasantly and sympathetically for anything. But, when the orchestra returned they gave them a standing ovation; which showed that they really wanted people playing the music and not machines. Electronic music can be quite terrifying, and for horror films or horror operas it can be just the thing to use. But I don't think that I shall experiment with it at all.

A.G. When you were on your Russian tour did you have much contact with the composers there?

Sir A. Yes, we were met by Kabelevsky at the airport; he gave us a very warm welcome. Khachaturian was there, whom I have met on several occasions. During the visit, Shostakovitch came to see me. We had several long talks together about music and things. When he came to England later, I remember taking him to a concert of Elizabethan Madrigals. He was absolutely charmed by them, having never heard anything like Orlando Gibbons etc.

A.G. Coming back to your own music, one composition that has always intrigued me is **Rout**. Can you tell me more about it's background?

Sir A. That was one of my earlier indiscretions! It began as a chamber work, until Diaghilev approached me about using it during an interval at the ballet. (The idea was to fill the gap between two short ballets with a modern work . . . a very agreeable and civilised idea, I think.) The orchestra under Ansermet were to play the work, so I duly rescored it for full orchestra. I had not heard it for years, until I was asked to record it for Lyrita. The whole idea of the work is to represent a carnival heard from behind a window; it's effective, I think.

A.G. Out of sheer curiosity on my part, what is your own favourite composition?

Sir A. The next one! (at this point Sir Arthur kept me guessing as to its nature.) It's a set of variations for orchestra, and it will be performed at the opening of the Croydon Festival. It takes up the whole of the first half, and is followed by Stokowski conducting the **Pathétique**. It will be conducted by Vernon Handley, who always conducts my works well. He wastes no time during rehearsals, but gets straight to the heart of the matter, and he has all the necessary technique.

At this point we both adjourned for tea.

Author's note: The **Metamorphic Variations** proved to be Bliss' last large scale orchestral work. One other large work was the cantata **Shield of Faith**, written for St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The style of these last works shows clearly that his personal musical development had not stagnated, but was still progressing and growing in a very healthy fashion.



ARTHUR BLISS by Wyndham Lewis, 1922; by permission of Lady Bliss.

THE MUSIC OF BLISS

(A listener's view)

In these brief notes I have attempted to draw attention to some of the more rewarding aspects of Bliss' music, in the hope of stimulating a renewed interest and appreciation of his work. The notes are not intended to serve as full scale analytical studies and many of the works have been treated in greater detail elsewhere. Every work that has been verified (to date) as Bliss' own has been covered, if only by its date of composition.

Bliss' music is essentially English. This does not mean that he followed the folk-song revival movement which was prevalent during his early years, but that he felt more akin to Elgar than to Vaughan Williams or Holst. Stravinskian rhythms and the brilliance of 'Les Six' also influenced his early works, though later in life he found a style unmistakably his own.

Madame Noy, described by Bliss as a "Witchery Song", is perhaps his first effective work. He often referred to his early works as "slight indiscretions"! But in them are the seeds of much of what was to come. A lyrical woodwind flourish introduces the soprano without fussy elaboration. The tune bounces along and a flowing refrain is introduced. This refrain is also to appear in the last few passages. It was not fully appreciated at its first appearance; only lately has the humour of the work become acceptable. The words were chosen by Bliss from an anthology by E. W. H. Meyerstein, and are an improvisation on the *Old Mother Hubbard* rhyme. They concern a Cornish hag, who attempts to prevent a marriage by sinking the groom's boat with the aid of black magic. Her attempts fail and the last laugh is on her in more ways than one! A pre-electric recording of this work exists, with Anne Thursfield singing in fine dramatic style. The song ought to be recorded in modern sound.

These earlier compositions illustrate the truth of Bliss' own words, "I greatly enjoyed being part of the stir that the young hornets, Honegger, Poulenc, Auric, as well as Milhaud, were causing."

Although the folk-song movement had no charms for Bliss, he did feel a sympathy with the music of the Elizabethans and Purcell. In 1967 Bliss was commissioned to write two hymns for the new Cambridge Hymnal. One of the results was *Pen Selwood* to words by the sixteenth century poet George Herbert. It evokes immediately the atmosphere of Elizabethan England. From Purcell's dramatic and stage works Bliss extracted several items, orchestrating them to form his *Set of Act Tunes and Dances*.

Bliss' greatest and most significant works are probably *Morning Heroes*, the ballets, *Meditations on a Theme by John Blow*, *Metamorphic Variations* and the opera *Tobias and the Angel*. His last large-scale work was *Shield of Faith*, a cantata written for St. George's Chapel, Windsor. For those who maintain that his musical language had not changed since the 1930s, this is an adequate refutation. At the opening section "Done is the Battel on the Dragon Blak" we hear a greatly changed composer from the Bliss of the *Piano Concerto* and even the later *Cello Concerto*. A recognisable vein runs throughout all his works, but there is a continual transformation and assimilation of modern innovations, without crude mimicry of "with-it" techniques. That is the essence of Bliss – an ability to be original, appealing, but not "fashionable"

LIST OF WORKS

Categories:

1. Orchestral and band music
2. Films, TV and incidental music
3. Stage works (opera, ballet)
4. Choral and song
5. Chamber and instrumental
6. Fanfares and ceremonial music
7. Arrangements of other works

1. Orchestral and Band Music

Belmont Variations for Brass Band

This is the second test piece that Bliss wrote for brass and dates from 1963. The title refers to the town of Belmont in Massachusetts, U.S.A., the birthplace of Lady Bliss. The theme of the variations is stated after a four bar introduction. Following the *Waltz* (fourth section) there is an amusing *ad lib* cadenza for cornet, euphonium and trombone.

A Colour Symphony

Requiring new works for the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester Cathedral in 1922, Elgar commissioned Bliss to write a large-scale work for orchestra. How Bliss came to write a symphony related to the four primary colours is described in the Conversations earlier in this article. The result was a work of intense vitality and feeling. Bliss was undoubtedly right in commenting that it sounded very queer in the Cathedral in those days – its like had certainly not been attempted before in such a setting.

All of Elgar's major works had already been composed and it is to his music as well as to the new rhythmic vitality of Stravinsky that *A Colour Symphony* owes its flavour. It contains no imitation of either Elgar or Stravinsky but certain of their mannerisms can be heard transformed by Bliss' invention and wit. (Elgar in the pageantry of the first movement, *Purple*; Stravinsky in the rhythmic drive of the third movement, *Blue*; Neoclassicism in the double fugue of the finale, *Green*.)

The idea of colours relating to music is not a new one; both Rimsky-Korsakov and Scriabin had drawn up different conversion charts relating colour to keys. Bantock had used coloured lights to highlight moods in his choral symphony *Atalanta in Calydon*. But Bliss' conception is different from these in taking the heraldic symbolism as its starting point.

Though the symphony is not programmatic, an understanding of the colour symbolism is essential for a full appreciation of the work. The first movement, *Purple* (the colour of amethysts, pageantry, royalty and death), is in three related sections. Three themes appear in march-like order, culminating in a loud climax. Then follow the same themes but in reverse order and seen from different viewpoints, suggesting perhaps the gradual change of colours as the hours of daylight progress. A bell indicates the closing of the movement, then a four bar coda and finally a stroke on the gong – perhaps a death knell. *Red* (the colour of rubies, wine, revelry, furnaces, courage and magic) is the title of the second movement, or *scherzo*. A fanfare-like trumpet theme is its basic material. A series of four tunes form the exposition, then

the first theme of *Purple* reappears subtly beneath the last of the four – as red is close to purple. This forms the structure of a development section ending “like glowing embers”. After an oboe cadenza the two main themes reappear as a recapitulation, to be curtailed by a long coda – “a blaze of scarlet flame”. Heralded by quick drum taps all the tunes re-emerge, blasting forth in a glorious welter of sound.

A slow movement follows entitled *Blue* (the colour of sapphires, deep water, skies, loyalty and melancholy). A gentle rhythmic pulse pervades the first part and returns later in much stronger form. From the outset it suggests the play of sunlight on water, blue and glittering. The woodwind that follow evoke the blueness of the skies in midsummer, giving way to a louder version of the rhythmic opening, capped by a trumpet tune (loyalty?). The central section, introduced by a trill on the flute, leads to a melancholy theme building up to a huge fortissimo on trombones. This idea is developed and soars effortlessly into an arch-like crescendo and diminuendo, using the primary rhythm as its foundation. Thus the coda sets a mood totally different from that at the beginning of the movement, as the blues of the morning sky are transmuted by the passing of day.

Spring is the overall atmosphere of *Green* (the colour of emeralds, hope, joy, youth, spring and victory). Bliss uses a double fugue subject, somewhat similar to Bach's great *St. Anne's Fugue* in being in three sections. The fugue was a device which Bliss took to be a symbol of constant growth and expansion. It is fresh, vivid, crisp music.

A Colour Symphony was dedicated to Adrian Boult, a friend and colleague, when both men were at the start of their careers.

Cello Concerto

Mstislav Rostropovich persuaded Bliss to write a concerto for him to play at Aldeburgh, where it received its first performance in 1970 with the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Benjamin Britten – altogether a happy combination. Originally Bliss had called it a ‘Concertino’ but Britten cajoled him into giving the work a more fitting title.

It is Bliss' fourth and last concerto and is in three movements. The cellist is thrown in at the deep end, as is usual in a Bliss concerto, and seldom gets a chance to rest for long. The mood is set by the opening cello theme, a vigorous motif which pervades the first movement. The next section, marked *Larghetto*, is more rhapsodic, containing a contemplative passage for solo cello. In the final movement the work reaches its climax when the original cello theme is restated with the full orchestra in the fashion of a chorale.

Piano Concerto

In 1939 the World's Fair was held in New York and, as part of the British Week, Bliss was commissioned by the British Council to write a piano concerto. The first performance was given by Solomon, with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. Straightway it achieved a great measure of success. Fortunately we can listen to a very fine recording made in 1943 by Solomon, Boult and the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The concerto is written in the grand manner of Beethoven, Brahms and Rachmaninov. It displays no dreamy rhapsodising but a strong development and is one of the few British piano concertos to achieve a repertoire position throughout the world.

Concerto for Piano, Tenor Voice, Strings and Percussion

This work, written in 1920, has an interesting history of rewritings and revisions. In 1923 Bliss rewrote it as the *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*. The original manuscript is believed to have been lost during the Second World War. Koussevitsky gave the first performance of the second version in 1924, and Stokowski another one year later.

Between 1925 and 1929, then later in 1950, the concerto underwent two more revisions and in 1968 further adjustments were made so that it could be played on two pianos with only three hands. This final arrangement was for Phyllis Sellick and Cyril Smith, who gave the first performance in a 1969 Henry Wood Promenade Concert, subsequently recording it. The revisions were apparently undertaken not through a sense of dissatisfaction with the score, but because Bliss felt that the original combination might restrict performances. The final revision was the result of an invitation from the two soloists.

Violin Concerto

This work was commissioned by the BBC as a piece for violin and orchestra in 1953. During the formative stages of the work Bliss had many rehearsals with Alfredo Campoli, to whom the concerto is dedicated, and who proved to be of invaluable assistance to the composer in several "difficult passages". Bliss has provided very illuminating notes about this work on the sleeve of the Decca recording.

Discourse for Orchestra

This was written for the Louisville Orchestra in 1957 and was revised (recomposed) in 1965. The title was chosen by Bliss to describe a "musical dissertation on an announced subject". This prime subject appears in the first four bars and is modified and elaborated throughout the work. There are six clearly defined sections:

1. A preliminary survey – *Moderato-Larghetto*
2. A more disturbing view – *Con moto a risoluto*
3. A gayer *Vivace*
4. A contemplative *Andante tranquillo*
5. An emphatic restatement of the subject and a brief return to no. 3.
6. A peroration, followed by a quiet close.

Edinburgh Overture

Composed for the Edinburgh Festival of 1956, this was first performed under the directorship of Bliss himself, with Beecham sharing the other half of the concert. It is no bombastic tub-thumper, but a work of great beauty and stirring effect. The full orchestra comes together only in the central section heralding the 'Pavane for Mary, Queen of Scots', and occurring again immediately after it. The overture ends in a short blast in which the full orchestra is used for only one bar. The overall subtlety of colouring is highly reminiscent of Britten, but the pavane has a rare and delicate beauty all of its own. The theme is stated by the strings, then adopted by the woodwind and brass. It drifts around the orchestra like a soft mist on the Scottish highlands, bringing to mind the imposing remains of Hermitage Castle, where Queen Mary was imprisoned for a time. The *Edinburgh Overture* would make a fine study work for those at music colleges, as an essay on construction and style.

The First Guards

1956 saw the tercentenary of the establishment of the Grenadier Guards. This full scale march was written in honour of the occasion and deserves to be heard much more often. Like *Welcome the Queen* it has an Elgarian structure but lacks the empty Edwardian pomposity often found in such ceremonial music.

Hymn to Apollo

Bliss described this as a short invocation to Apollo in his manifestation as god of the healing art – Apollo Latromantis. It was written in 1926 and was revised in 1964 for a slightly smaller orchestra.

Introduction and Allegro

Stokowski, now a musical legend, was the source of inspiration for this work. After his two-year stay in the United States, Bliss had been impressed by the unique sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra, then in its hey-day, and wrote this piece for full orchestra. Stokowski gave the first American performance in 1927, but Bliss had already conducted the work at a Queen's Hall Promenade Concert the preceding year. After the American airing Stokowski made several constructive suggestions to Bliss, who readily adopted them, realising their value. It is this final revised version (published in 1937) that is played today.

In spite of its title the *Introduction and Allegro* could be described as a Toccata for Orchestra (a toccata being essentially a display of virtuosity), as all the motifs are passed over very rapidly. This technique brings to mind some of the Bach chorale preludes and as an example of the neoclassical idiom precedes Stravinsky by some years. The piece is in two closely linked sections and avoids any mimicry of Elgar that the title may suggest.

Kenilworth Suite

This was written as a test piece for the National Brass Band Festival of 1936, held at Crystal Palace. In it Bliss creates an impression of the visit of Queen Elizabeth I to Kenilworth Castle in 1575. There are three sections:

1. *At the Castle Gates*; a fanfare and ceremony of the keys.
2. *Serenade on the Lake*; the spirit of the lake appears floating on an island to welcome the queen.
3. *March, Kenilworth*, inscribed "Homage to Queen Elizabeth".

The *Kenilworth Suite* has proved to be a very popular brass work and is in most band repertoires.

The Linburn Air

Bliss composed this short march in 1965 for the Scottish National Institute for the War Blinded. It has a very gentle central subject most suitable for the occasion.

Meditations on a Theme by John Blow

The theme around which this whole work revolves can be found in Blow's setting of Psalm 23 from *Coronation Anthems with Strings*, published in *Musica Britannica*. Instead of using a string orchestra, as might be expected, for this set of variations, Bliss employs a full orchestra to create his intended effect.

It was a rare stroke of genius that prompted Bliss to arrange the variations (or *Meditations*, as he preferred to call them) in the very spiritual form of the psalm itself.

He intended to convey the feelings produced by the actual Biblical text and succeeded so well that few people go away after a performance without having experienced an uplifting of the soul.

The work begins with an Introduction: *The Lord is my Shepherd; I will Fear no Evil*. A slow pastorale with woodwind in prominence is interrupted by chromatics from the brass. It progresses into the 'Evil' theme which is boldly outlined by the opening John Blow theme.

In Meditation I, *He Leadeth me beside the Still Waters*, we are led by no Beethoven's babbling brook, but by a cool English stream such as abound in the Malvern hills. The second Meditation, *Thy Rod and Staff Comfort me*, is an allegro emphasising the strength of God and is a movement of great robustness. Meditation III, *Lambs*, is a joyful, bouncing dance, characteristically youthful. In this movement, unlike the first, the sheep bells are not included. As more of the work progresses more of Blow's tune becomes apparent, and in Meditation IV, *He Restoreth my Soul*, Bliss begins softly and builds up the texture, inferring restoration. This has much in common with the Dance of Deliverance in *Miracle in the Gorbals*. Meditation V, *In Green Pastures*, evokes the atmosphere of the English downland and is a tranquil prelude in marked (and typically Bliss moded) contrast to the next section, which begins without a break. It is an Interlude, *Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death*. In likening death to an interlude Bliss gives us a rare glimpse of the mystic side of his character, a facet of his make-up which became increasingly important and discernible in his last years, particularly in *Shield of Faith*. The 'Evil' music that was first heard in the Introduction is developed in truly diabolical fashion, with many a hint of *Things to Come*. It gathers force in a subtle and controlled manner and leads directly into the Finale, *In the House of the Lord*. We seem to enter a quiet garden, disturbed only by a few birds, then we pass through a door into the House. There is a short section remarkably like *Processional* and the closer we approach the centre of the building, the more Blow's tune reveals itself until, quite suddenly, it unfolds, only to fade slowly as we leave the beatific vision and return earthwards to the pastures whence we began our journey.

As in much of Bliss' music, he manages to draw us closer to an understanding of the human condition – its struggle between good and the evil of its own making. This conflict is present in all the ballets, *Morning Heroes*, the sacred cantatas and most notably in *Tobias and the Angel*, where it becomes much more obvious. Bliss' vision of this conflict differs from work to work as do the circumstances of our own private conflicts.

The Meditations were commissioned by the Feeney Trust for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, to whom the work is jointly dedicated along with their then conductor, Rudolf Schwarz. The latter has commented that this work reveals Bliss at his best. What better recommendation is needed?

Mélée Fantastique This remarkable work was written as a memorial to Bliss' friend, Claude Lovat Fraser. It was his first large orchestral work to achieve performance, being conducted by Sir Henry Wood at a Promenade Concert in 1921. Lovat Fraser was a designer and artist of great calibre, with a fiery and rather Bakst-like style. And so the music is both colourful and balletic.

It falls into three sections, separated by elegiac passages without breaks and begins with a rhythmic theme played first on the double bass and double bassoon. A secondary theme is stated by the woodwind and strings, then an abrupt change of

tempo – *allegro molto energico* – introduced by the xylophone, trumpets, trombones and glockenspiel effects a direct ornamentation of the opening theme. This develops until the horns introduce a rocking figure, while the woodwind play another development of the opening section. The full orchestra restates the opening section, employing new patterns of cross rhythms and developing the original thematic material even further. Here the ‘Fantasque’ of the title is well illustrated.

The first elegiac section follows almost immediately, displaying great charm and vitality. Throughout this *moderato sostenuto* the composer conveys a feeling of affection and a sense of loss. This soon changes into a vital redevelopment of the first theme, anticipating *Miracle in the Gorbals*. Next comes the great climax of the work: a shrill statement of five identical notes heralds the approaching peak. The tam-tam ushers in a series of three outbursts for full orchestra, then a more restrained version of this tumult leads into the second elegiac section, again on the strings, and the music finally drifts back into the opening phrase. Plucked strings reinforced by timpani give out two rapid word-statements and the work ends quietly in an unexpected key, dying away into silence – *niente*, a favourite device of Bliss.

Metamorphic Variations (Variations for Orchestra)

Bliss was a master of the theme and variations technique, as can be heard in his *Meditations on a Theme by John Blow*. In *Metamorphic Variations* each new development springs directly from the preceding section, though contrasting markedly with it. This was Bliss’ last purely orchestral work and is no doubt one of his finest. It was completed in December 1972 as a commission from the Croydon Arts Festival to begin their 1973 season. The first performance was given in the Fairfield Halls, Croydon, by the London Symphony Orchestra under Vernon Handley. Despite the serious competition from Stokowski in the second half, Bliss’ work brought the house down and Sir Arthur was recalled to the platform several times to acknowledge the applause. The critics reacted predictably – some for, some against – thus maintaining a tradition to which Elgar and Vaughan Williams had also been subjected.

During its composition the work was given added impetus by a series of abstract paintings from the brush of George Dannatt, being in the nature of developments of a particular subject. The original title was *Variations for Orchestra*, the word ‘Metamorphic’ only being added by Bliss after the first performance, since the three main themes undergo a more complex form of transformation than that which the word ‘variation’ implies. His alteration suggests a series of changes paralleling the metamorphosis of certain minerals. The work is dedicated to George and Ann Dannatt, in token of a long and cherished friendship. One can perhaps hear an abstract portrait of them in the music of section 13.

The variations are fourteen in number, all based on three elemental themes that appear in the opening movement, *Elements*. There are however two supplementary sections, 3 & 4, entitled *Contrasts* and *Children’s March*. These are to be inserted “if the conductor so wishes”. (For the first performance they were both omitted).

Section 1 is entitled *Elements*. After a quiet stroke on the Tam-tam a solo oboe cantilena presents the primary element of the work, then comes a short four note phrase for horns, echoed by the strings. The following development utilises these two primary themes and then, strikingly, we hear a ‘cluster’ of notes on the woodwind and horns.

The next section, *Ballet*, launches straightaway into a waltz. Marked 'liltingly', it incorporates part of the first oboe phrase of the opening section. The harp rises slowly into section 3, *Assertion*. Basically this is again a modification of the primary element, emphasised by timpani and side drums. There is a full statement of the primary element by flutes and clarinets, then a bassoon trill leads into section 4, *Speculation* (that is if the two optional sections are to be omitted). The trill is taken over by the flutes, oboes, clarinets and muted cellos, and one hears an interesting treatment of the third element woven in with the second. In this part is a haunting passage with slight interjections from strings and woodwind, like a scene reflected in a rippled lake. A solo violin dies away *niente* and the scene itself appears in section 5, *Interjections*. An *andante sostenuto* on solo trumpet is followed by a clarinet *cadenza* and the second element appears more prominently. Towards the end of this movement the second element can be heard on brass, followed immediately by the trumpet stating the first element again. Section 6, *Scherzo*, begins with a fugue in the manner of Bach, played on the strings. This free fugue builds up with a virile trumpet tune which breaks off suddenly, then it rebuilds a great climax reminding us of the vigour of the Finale in *Checkmate*. But the climax falls away and a solo viola tune leads to section 7, *Contemplation*. Octave patterns by the various orchestral departments, obviously derived from the second element, are interspersed with horns and harp glissandi, evoking images of moonlight. A central section blossoms, then vanishes, leaving the octave patterns once again. 8, *Polonaise*, is more Spanish than Polish, with castanets to the fore. The oboe theme in striking rhythmic variation is used throughout the orchestra, leading to section 9, *Funeral Processions*. This provides just the right contrast after the preceding merry dance. It begins with drum taps in Whitmanesque fashion, becomes elegiac, then terse, and an heroic march unfolds. The trumpet plays an oration over the seemingly endless procession of mourners and is brought to a peak of intensity with bass drum, cymbals and full brass.

After a short pause section 10 begins quietly, well illustrating its title, *Cool Interlude*. This refreshing movement sets the scene for the final four sections, a much more cohesive group. All the tension built up previously dissipates into the memory; the violence and frenzy retreat into the distance. *Cool Interlude* is basically a delicate development of the second element, using celesta, woodwind, and cello and viola solos. It ends with a relaxed violin *cadenza*. In section 11, *Scherzo 2*, the brass is divided by wood blocks in rhythmic interchange. The momentum is taken up by strings and drums, which are then joined again by the brass and wood blocks, leading into the first full statement of the third element (cluster). The twelfth section is *Duet*. Violin and cello solos play against lush string background with harp and celesta sentences. It includes a reference to the *Contemplation* section, evoking moonlight once again. In the penultimate section, *Dedication*, Bliss uses the initials of the dedicatees, GDAD, as a type of fanfare-canon and develops it into a ceremonial movement including tubular bells. It brings the work to its final section 14, *Affirmation*. Taking up the ceremonial idea, it develops until a blow on the Tam-tam announces the finale. At the climax the music dissolves into the oboe cantilena, the primary element from the opening pages of the work.

Bliss often said that most of his music was conceived after an extra-musical inspiration had sparked him off. In the case of *A Colour Symphony* it was heraldry. Here he begins without any sort of literal imagery, but after seeing the series of paintings by George Dannat, one can see a connection between the two art forms.

Music for Strings

Bliss tells us that this was written as an exercise in 'pure' music whilst he was at work on the score for the film *Things to come*.

The composer writes, "It is an extended work for string orchestra in three movements, though the first and second are joined by a bridge passage. At the end of the first movement a quintet of soloists lead into the rhapsodic second movement. The third movement starts with a short Introduction in which the two main themes are briefly stated before the finale gets spiritedly under way".

It was first performed in Salzburg in 1935, by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult.

Phoenix March (Homage to France), 1945

That this work is considered by many as a trite piece of little consequence is possibly due to a very poor recording made in the mid-forties. The title suggests the great country rising again from the ashes of German occupation.

Rout

The single word title should be interpreted as meaning revelry. Written in 1920, this exhilarating piece was intended by Bliss to sound like a carnival some distance away, heard through a window. Scored for chamber ensemble and solo voice (the voice is directed to act as one of the instruments rather than as a soloist in the true sense), it was first performed at a chamber concert at 139 Piccadilly (by permission of the Baroness d'Erlanger). Among the audience were such fashionable figures as Ezra Pound, Paul Nash, John Drinkwater and Edward Wadsworth. The work was so well liked that it had to be repeated after the programme. *Rout* was later scored for full orchestra and used as an interval piece by the Diaghilev Ballet, under Ansermet.

Although *Rout* employs a soprano voice, she has no words to sing; only disjointed vowels and consonants, chosen for their rounded and explosive characters respectively. The result looks appalling on paper, but sounds so attractive that the listener finds himself straining his ears to catch what seems to be a word. This is the essence of the work – the listening for what might be. It was a revolutionary work at the time and still is in its own way.

Two Studies for Orchestra

Written in 1920 and first performed at the Royal College of Music Patrons' Fund Concert that year, the two movements are '*Adagio ma non troppo*' and '*Allegro*'. The work requires a fairly large orchestra and lasts about twelve minutes. Sir Arthur was often rather cagey about reviving certain of his early works, but these two might well demonstrate the successful fruition of his earlier attempts.

Theme and Cadenza for Violin & Orchestra

Strangely, this work came into being as incidental music for a radio play. The play was written by Lady Bliss, an accomplished writer, in 1946 and it represents part of a violin concerto written by a composer, who is the subject of the play. It is poignantly terse music, a strange combination for Bliss, but it fits the tragic atmosphere of the play, and keeps closely in touch with musical trends of the time.

Twone, the House of Felicity

Five Glimpses of an Anonymous Theme for Captions, was a composite work by several composers, put together for Eugene Goossens to play with his orchestra in 1923. This was Bliss' contribution to the collection, but the score has been lost.

2. Films and TV music

ABC TV Title and Interlude Music

The title might suggest something rather dry from the early days of TV. But Bliss, as usual, manages to find gold amongst the corn. The basic material for both short pieces, are the chords of A, B and C major. This sounds a little silly, just three notes for a tune, but no! Interesting link passages are posed between each blast of the three chords, making an interesting whole. The interlude music is a waltz in typical Bliss style, but still featuring ABC as the main focal point. I have not seen the visual material which it was to complement, but would suggest that the letters ABC would appear in time with the music for the title section, whilst the interlude could cover the test pattern or a suitable series of pictures. These are mere trifles, but masterly solutions to the problem posed. The music was used for many years after the enfranchisement of the ABC TV Company.

An Age of Kings. Music for the BBC TV series

In 1960 the BBC embarked on a series of Shakespeare plays concerning the English monarchy. Compared to much of Bliss' output these pieces seem rather sombre, but they successfully provide the right atmosphere for their subjects. The three short sections, *Prelude, Chorale and Postlude*, have subsequently been arranged by Frank Erikson for concert performance with concert band.

As You Like It. Incidental music.

The material is derived from Elizabethan sources and the work was written in 1919 for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. It contains many period folk song arrangements and settings of William Byrd and Giles Farnaby. The very small ensemble involved – string quartet and singers – is just right for the theatre.

Caesar and Cleopatra. Projected film score.

Bliss wrote many film scores, a few of which have become repertory works in the form of concert suites. Others have disappeared along with the films for which they were written. Bliss was commissioned to write the music for the 1944 film *Caesar and Cleopatra*. The score was duly completed but the composer found it impossible to work with the temperamental director and Georges Auric finally complied. The music which remains from Bliss' score is in manuscript form, with two pages missing from section 5. The sections run:

1. *Overture*
2. *Title 1*
3. *Soldiers' Chorus*
4. *Title 2 (The Sea)*
5. *Title 3*
6. *Memphis at Night*
7. *Fragment*
8. *Dance Interlude (3 dances) and Barcarolle*

9. *Ftataeeta*10. *Cleopatra*

The order in which the movements appear may not in fact fit the film. The music is extremely evocative, particularly '*Memphis at Night*' and the '*Dance Interlude*' would seem highly entertaining from a quick glance at a fading pencil manuscript. It is a great pity that this music, which must have cost Bliss much in time and effort, should be consigned to the unplayed musical limbo.

Christopher Columbus. Film music.

For the Gainsborough film of 1949 Bliss composed some very stirring and evocative music, for which the complete manuscript survives. Among the more rewarding sections to the listener might be included *The Castle*, *The Voyage Begins*, *Commission scene*, *Juana*, *Beatrice*, *Ave Maris Stella*, *Natives* and *The Return to Spain*. Perhaps we shall be able to hear them in the concert hall some day.

Ave Maris Stella would make a fine motet, but the two parts would need some adjustments for a concert performance. *The Return to Spain* is a splendid regal march, certainly one of Bliss' best. It deserves a better fate than inseparability from the film for which it was written.

Conquest of the Air. Film score.

This was a documentary film about the history of flight. It was made in 1937 by Alexander Korda, but was not released until 1940. The concert suite was actually premiered before the film in 1938 and it is this suite that is used in concert performances today, as the original film score has been lost. There are six sections:

1. *The Wind* – woodwind blusters away over gently flourishing strings, never suggesting anything other than a good stiff breeze.
2. *The Vision of Leonardo da Vinci* – accompanying shots of this Renaissance man watching birds in flight and sketching devices to help man achieve the same.
3. *Stunting* – the acrobatic feats of stunt pilots provide Bliss with a background for gymnastic music, which he realises perfectly.
4. *Over the Arctic* – a slow measure intended to accompany a plane landing on the ice near the Pole.
5. *Gliding* – using waltz time, Bliss transforms the gliders' flight into a graceful dance.
6. *Conquest of the Air* – this stately march, more dignified than celebratory, is typical of Bliss' ceremonial style.

Heritage of Britain

This was simply the short signature tune to a BBC radio feature programme, first broadcast in 1950. It was derived from the film score *Christopher Columbus*.

King Solomon. Incidental music.

This was for a play by Ira Remson, dated 1924, for a production in Santa Barbara that year. All material has been lost.

Men of Two Worlds. Film score.

A 'Two Cities' film of 1945 vintage, the story concerns Kisenga, an African scholar and concert pianist/composer, who returns to his homeland in a teaching capacity and as a local government official. The film begins with a fanfare based on a complex drum

rhythm, which Bliss uses throughout the score. A solo voice renders an arrangement of an African folk song, which then leads into *Baraza*.

'Baraza' is a Swahili word for the discussion in council between a chief and his head man. In the score it becomes a movement of a piano concerto written by Kisenga and played by him at a National Gallery concert. The concerto has three short movements with piano cadenza, and a male voice choir singing in Swahili – a stirring work, exactly right for the occasion. (In fact, throughout the film, the music carries the poor screenplay.) *Baraza* was soon recorded by Decca with the original performers, Eileen Joyce with Muir Mathieson conducting the National Symphony Orchestra.

The film continues with a sequence of Kisenga's return to Africa, and Bliss' brief was for bustling, excited music. But when Bliss saw the sequence in the studio – a short scene showing Mount Kilimanjaro, snow-capped and blue in the distance – he turned to the director and said, "That is the emotional peg on which the scene rests". So, instead of a rather nondescript hustle and bustle, the music is sweeping, slow, and speaks of the feelings of Kisenga on seeing his homeland again.

The score makes use of two Tanganyikan folk songs, arranged as one of Kisenga's compositions and sung by his pupils. The local witch doctor tries to assert his evil dominance over the chief, his people and Kisenga, attempting to kill the latter by witchcraft. In the music a battle takes place between the themes of *Baraza*, the children's song and the evil drums of Magole, the witch doctor. The eventual triumph of Kisenga leads into the final passages, where the villagers have been persuaded by him to move to a more healthy site, away from the breeding grounds of the tsetse fly and the ravages of sleeping sickness.

Baraza, available for concert performance, begins with a dialogue between piano and trumpet. Full orchestra then joins in with the principal theme, followed by the male chorus. This develops into the piano cadenza, containing the drumming theme of Magole. A larghetto section follows and the chorus returns in a different mood. The brass blaze into a vivace and the work ends in a welter of sound from all departments. This is one of Bliss' most rewarding short works.

Présence au Combat

This was the score for an Anglo-French propaganda film of 1946. The original music has all been lost with the exception of one item, *Supply Sequence*. In 1949 parts of the material were used in another government film, *Faster than Sound*.

Royal Palaces Music

This is a short suite of items written for the BBC-ITV series *Royal Palaces*. Each section is intended to fit the period and architectural style of the palace in question. The suite contains a charming waltz.

Seven Waves Away, or Abandon Ship

This film was made in 1956. Only three items survive, *Allegro con fuoco*, *Marcia funebre* and *Allegro*.

Summer Day's Dream. Incidental music.

This was written for a play by J. B. Priestley, produced in 1949. Little music was needed apparently, and only *Christopher's Theme* survives.

Spirit of the Age. TV title music.

This was a BBC commission for its illuminating series on English architecture.

produced by John Drummond. The music, though short, is stirring and stately; a strange blend of the two Elizabethan periods in our history. Scored for brass, percussion and piano, a fanfare leads into a short march. The music was recorded by Bliss with members of the London Symphony Orchestra only a month before his death – a fitting finale to his life's work.

The Tempest. Incidental music.

Written in 1921 for a production of Shakespeare's play at the Aldwych Theatre, only *Storm* survives. These two confluent movements are scored for a strange combination of woodwind, brass, piano and a veritable battery of percussion, with fleeting parts for two voices.

Things to Come. Film score.

Alexander Korda's film is a classic of science fiction films. H. G. Wells attended a lecture given by Bliss at the Royal Institution and afterwards approached the composer with the film score proposition. Bliss accepted and film music took on a completely new aspect. Gone was the musical wallpaper label; the score was now to become an integral part of the action. Bliss worked with Korda and Wells to produce as complete a fusion of sound and sight as was possible. Every mood was enhanced by the music, from the children's game to the world in ruins and the great destiny of Man in the finale.

Bliss said about the score, "It should be judged solely as music – that is to say, by the ear alone, and the question of its value depends on whether it can stand up to the test." He goes on, "While I was writing my *Things to Come* music, I felt that I was to some extent surrendering my musical individuality to the needs of the film itself". He has explained, "As a counterbalance I determined to write a purely abstract concert piece for the more austere medium of the string orchestra".

The music has outlasted the film. The concert suite was a resounding success in the 1935 Proms and soon became a regular repertoire piece. It is still played. Of course there is much more music in the film than in the concert piece and in recent years Christopher Palmer has reconstructed some of the missing music, as the original score has been lost. It is good to have more of the music available, but some of the sections have been linked together.

In 1936 the Decca Record Company took immediate advantage of the success of the film by recording five numbers from the score (not from the concert suite), and the finale has an effective choral part which was dropped from the composer's subsequent arrangement. Christopher Palmer uses an organ in his version.

War in the Air

In 1959 the BBC commissioned Bliss to write the signature tunes for this programme. There are just two very short parts, each lasting less than a minute. The music is taken from *Salute to the RAF*, written in 1956, but is here somewhat expanded.

Welcome the Queen

In 1954 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, returned from their tour of the Commonwealth. The march, *Welcome the Queen*, and the choral work, *Song of Welcome*, celebrated that occasion. The march is very Elgarian but has much of Bliss' originality – a perfect period piece. It was actually commissioned for a short newsfilm about the Queen's journey and return to Britain.

3. Stage Works (Opera and Ballet)

Adam Zero. Ballet

This was Bliss' third ballet and is musically probably the most rewarding. It was written in 1946 to a scenario by Michael Benthall, who had already worked with Bliss in *Miracle in the Gorbals*. In retrospect one can see that the plot was years ahead of its time. The story is a fatalistic approach to the life of Man, based on Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage".

The ballet is in sixteen sections:

1. *Fanfare Overture*. This stirring fanfare is played whilst the curtain is down.
2. *The Stage*. The curtain rises and a ponderous opening leads into a more lyrical section, all with throbbing like heart-beats from the bass.
3. *The Birth of Adam*. This starts mysteriously but gradually changes into a rather religious funeral march before it closes.
4. *Adam's Fates*. This spirited section shows the Fates spinning the thread of Adam's life and contains the 'Fate' theme which reappears in later movements.
5. *Dance of Spring*. Here is the bustle of a new life. There are three themes, closely interwoven, one of which returns in 13. A gentle flowing lyricism forms the next dance –
6. *Awakening of Love* – and it points to the next –
7. *Bridal Ceremony*. A simple, arch-like phrase (the Tudor, flattened arch) is repeated with much accompanying elaboration, reminding us of the *Ceremony of the Bishops* in *Checkmate*.
8. *Adam achieves Power*. Here two joyful, bouncing tunes jostle together, sandwiching the rather sombre middle section, suggestive of the power newly found in Adam's inexperienced hands.
9. *Re-entry of Adam's Fates*. This section is a restatement of no. 4, but the mood has changed slightly. It leads straight into –
10. *Dance of Summer* – perhaps the most memorable part of the ballet. A series of upward sweeps on strings over held woodwind and trombones, interspersed with a fanfare-like phrase, directs us onto the lyrical central theme with the upwards strokes adopted by the flutes. The dance ends *alla marcia*, but with a final, unexpected minor chord, suggesting a foreboding future as summer draws to its close.
11. *Approach of Autumn*. Slow steps stealthily approach, creeping *larghetto*, like the constant passage of time.
12. *Night Club Scene*. A six bar flourish precedes a series of dance sections, cleverly joined. This is achieved with great wit and verve and includes a tango and a rumba-like measure. It leads straight into –
13. *Destruction of Adam's World*. As the night club music slowly changes atmosphere, the spring theme returns, stated very slowly and falling dramatically at the end of the phrase, indicating the collapse of Adam's aspirations.
14. *Approach of Winter*. This is really a sinister prelude to the next number, which follows immediately.
15. *Dance with Death*. This contains what must be one of Bliss' best tunes. Slow, step-like measures (from Autumn?) lead into a beautifully serene theme ("Lovely and soothing death, serenely arriving"), which dies away very quietly.

16. *Finale: The Stage is Set Again.* The 'Fate' theme returns, then piccolo and flutes flourish over the bass theme from no. 2. The finale ends with a repeat of the fanfare from no. 1 as a coda.

Checkmate. Ballet

This was Bliss' first large-scale venture into the field of ballet and first appeared in London during the Vic-Wells season of October, 1937. Its première had been in Paris, five months earlier. At once the ballet was a resounding success and its continued popularity has been phenomenal in the world of British ballet.

The scenario is by Bliss himself and could not be bettered. His perfect sense of the dramatic cannot fail to excite the listener. Sets and costumes were by E. McKnight Kauffer.

From the first page of the score Bliss weaves a sense of mystery. The music falls into twelve movements:

1. *Prologue: The Players.* After a nine bar introduction a rising theme begins, developing in an angular manner. The curtain rises and the theme is reversed so that the phrases descend. Two players are seen, Love and Death. Death challenges Love by removing a gauntlet to reveal a skeleton claw, which advances menacingly across the board. After Love has made the first move the curtain falls, remaining down until the prologue music has ended.
2. *Dance of the Red Pawns.* The curtain rises to reveal a huge chess board. The red pawns perform a sprightly dance, reminiscent of the children's ballet in *Things to Come*.
3. *Dance of the Four Knights.* A robust tune dominates the dance, its angular structure suggesting the awkward moves made by the pieces.
The Black Knights kneel at the—
4. *Entry of the Black Queen.* Seductive and sinister, she fascinates the other pieces on the board.
5. *The Red Knight's Mazurka.* After throwing him a rose the Black Queen leaves and the Red Knight dances an exuberant solo.
6. *Ceremony of the Bishops.* Strings and bell herald the entry of the bishops in procession. They bless the knights and move to their positions at the back of the board.
7. *Entry of the Red Castles.* They enter with long, stiff strides to a march of great power. This music is derived from the film score of *Things to Come* (Building the new world).
8. *Entry of the Red King and Queen.* The King is old and feeble and is supported by his dignified Queen. Alas, she does not have the forcefulness of the black Queen.
9. *The Attack.* After the red pieces have assembled the black pieces enter and begin the manoeuvres. After much strategy the Red Knight is left to defend his King.
10. *The Duel.* Red Knight and Black Knight fight. The Red Knight prevails but, having the queen at his mercy, hesitates to strike. He drops his sword and produces the rose, but the Queen rises and stabs him in the back. The two Players appear. Death throws his black gauntlet onto the body of the Red Knight, who is carried out in procession. At last the Red King is alone with the Black Queen.
11. *The Black Queen Dances.* "The King in terror for his life, sits fascinated, as a

rabbit before a snake." Again Bliss uses the slithering, seductive music to portray a cool, calculating killer.

12. *Finale: Checkmate.* The King remains seated on the board. He looks around cautiously, then moves to seek escape. But at each turn he is thwarted by a hoard of Black pieces. The music is extremely menacing. The king suddenly rallies and draws himself up, remembering his youth, but is at last struck down by the Black Queen. She removes his crown – it is checkmate. Bliss builds up his finale in a most exciting manner, never failing to involve the listener.

The Lady of Shalott. Ballet

The story follows that of Tennyson's poem and was jointly devised by Bliss and Hassall. It was written in 1958 for the San Francisco Ballet, to open the new concert hall on the campus of the University of California in Berkeley. It had to wait until 1975 for a performance in this country, when the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra and the New Park Girls' School Ballet Group gave one for the TV programme, *Girl in a Broken Mirror*. *The Lady of Shalott* has not to date received a professional performance in Britain.

The ballet begins with a slow *Prelude*, when the curtain rises on a small tower room overlooking the river running down to Camelot. The Lady sits before an enormous mirror and weaves a tapestry of all she sees reflected in it. An old crone, dressed in black, sits at the foot of the tower. Prophecy foretells the Lady's doom should she ever turn to look at the real world. The second section is an extension of the first and is titled *The Lady at her Tapestry Frame*. As this ends the stage grows light, and *The Reapers* set out on their day's work. They pause, listening to the music from the tower, but soon continue on their way. The *Dance of the Villagers* follows. It is a spirited section for a large ensemble of dancers. Then comes *Dance of the Village Belle*, a vain, wanton creature, in plain contrast to the sedate Lady who yearns to make contact with the villagers, but cannot. The following three sections describe the arrival of two visitors to the tower. A splendidly clad page enters, approaches the Lady and presents her a token of love from his master. She shows bewilderment at the gift and the page tries to reassure her. The page's master enters, "an aristocratic, perfumed, insincere exquisite", who looks upon the villagers with snobbish disdain. The music echoes his superficiality. The knight dances a *Pas de Deux* with the Lady, he on the riverbank and she in the tower. The village belle passes and the knight entices her into the dance. The Lady, seeing his wayward nature, drops the token, repulses him and sits weeping. The knight leaves, discomfited.

The Tumblers enter, a group of strolling players. During their antics the villagers gossip about the knight's failure to win the Lady. The music here recalls the slander campaign in *Miracle in the Gorbals*. *The Re-entry of the Page* employs the page's theme but more agitated this time as the crowd jeer him. *The Abbot* enters to chiming music and quells the mockery. The crowd disperses and *Two Lovers*, a recently wed pair remain. They dance while the Lady picks up the token and is troubled by their reflection. A funeral bell sounds across the water, heralding the *Funeral Cortege*. This is prophetic, foretelling the death of the Lady herself, when she at last falls in love. She is troubled by the close proximity of love and death as the cortege passes down to Camelot.

The Entry of Lancelot is introduced by his trumpet theme in the distance. He enters, "a magnificent creature, in love with life", as Tennyson describes him in part III of the poem. His music develops in a majestic manner from the trumpet fanfare

and the Lady, in spite of the spell, turns to look at him. She runs from the tower, disregarding the threats of the old crone, and dances with Lancelot, delighting in her new-found experience.

The Lady in Love with Lancelot depicts the funeral barge slowly entering while the stage darkens. The Lady and Lancelot kiss, the mirror shatters and she falls dead at his feet.

Epilogue begins as two black-robed bargees uncover the prow, on which is written 'The Lady of Shalott'. "Sir Lancelot muses a little space and says, 'She has a lovely face: God in his mercy lend her grace . . . the Lady of Shalott' ". She is placed on the barge as all the villagers creep in to watch. The barge begins its long journey down to Camelot and the curtain falls as only a dull red streak can be seen in the sky.

The music for this ballet differs considerably from the others in that it is far more symphonic than balletic, as is Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*.

Miracle in the Gorbals. Ballet.

Bliss' second ballet score dates from 1944 and was written for the Sadlers Wells Ballet to a scenario by Michael Benthall. It concerns a stranger, a Christ-like figure, whose appearance in the Glasgow slums reflects the Passion of Christ in a modern setting. The ballet has fifteen sections:

1. *Overture*. From ominous beginnings the music rises in a melancholy fashion. Perhaps the menacing drum beat echoes the savagery of the Second World War.
2. *The Street*. Bustling hubbub! This section energetically depicts daily life in the slums, with all its dinginess and grime.
3. *The Girl Suicide*. A friendless girl passes along the street to a plaintive tune, one of the phrases which probably came from Hector's farewell to Andromache in *Morning Heroes*. This heartrending melody follows the girl on her way down to the river.
4. *The Young Lovers*. In direct contrast, an idyllic, wistful melody on strings and woodwind meanders past with Elgarian delicacy.
5. *The Prostitute and the Boy*. A seductive waltz theme represents the prostitute as she plies her old trade.
6. *The Official*. Self-important, bumbling pizzicati accompany the Official, who orders the prostitute off the street.
7. *The Discovery of the Suicide's Body*. Children raise the alarm, which passes round the orchestra like gossip. People rush on from all directions and the Official enters (excited xylophone passages) demanding an explanation for the 'din.
8. *The Suicide's Body is Brought in*. A funeral march of great tenderness is played as the body is carried in. The Official cannot revive her and covers the body.
9. *The Stranger* appears from backstage, unsuccessfully obstructed by the Official. He stretches out his hand and revives the girl. (The raising of Lazarus.)
10. *Dance of Deliverance*. She rises and starts a slow dance (flute) in which the crowd gradually join. Many attempt to touch the Stranger's clothes. (The touching of Christ's garments)
11. *The Official and the Prostitute*. Seeing that his authority has collapsed, the Official seeks the prostitute's company.
12. *Intermezzo* – a quiet, tranquil interlude as the street life resumes its lazy tempo.

13. *The Slander Campaign*. The sly Official, having had his way with the prostitute, uses her to damage the Stranger's reputation. He has led the Stranger to her house by a ruse and the crowd gossips as it waits for the Stranger to emerge. When he does, the crowd insults him and follows him out.
14. *The Conversion of the Prostitute*. She discards her gaudy clothing, comes out and follows the Stranger.
15. *The Killing of the Stanger*. The Official has hired a razor gang to dispose of the Stranger. He is stabbed to death as a stroke on the Tam-tam is heard. During the following pause a ship's hooter is heard from the docks in the distance (the earthquake at the crucifixion). The music of the overture returns, with its menacing drum rhythm, as the body of the Stranger is found by the prostitute and the girl. They weep and comfort each other while a beggar covers the body and the curtain slowly falls to some of the most heart-rending music ever written.

The Olympians. Opera.

There is an old legend that when men ceased to believe in the Gods of Olympus, some of the Gods returned to the world as strolling players. On midsummer's day they resumed their ancient powers for a short time. This subject inspired the operatic libretto by Bliss' friend, J. B. Priestley. When the opera first ran at Covent Garden in 1949, its reception was mixed. The general comment was that it appeared to be a little 'old fashioned' and that it lacked dramatic effect. These criticisms are not totally without foundation, but there have been many worse operas that have fared better, if only because they have invited scandal or because their drama is so intense as to bewilder the audience and thus appear 'modern'.

Perhaps the twentieth century notion of drama is distorted. Sir Thomas Beecham once commented that an opera is not dramatic unless it contains a man chasing a woman round a table in pursuit of his desires, or unless mass killings abound. Bliss' two operas lack both these dramatic essentials. *The Olympians* is in three acts and in several places projects an atmosphere of Offenbach. On the whole the plot is a little involved and too contrived. The opera's saving grace is its music. Perhaps the most touching section is Madelein's aria *O Bitter, bitter is the beauty of this night*. The Gods' entertainment sequence, occupying practically all of act II, is probably the most rewarding section, along with the mock exorcism.

Tobias and the Angel. Opera.

Scarcely a handful of successful operas have been based on biblical themes. Other than those by Saint-Saens, Richard Strauss and Verdi, it is difficult to think of more. Surely, in this country in particular, biblical subjects are best treated in the traditional form of the oratorio. Bliss has given us several appealing sacred cantatas and many might expect this subject to have benefited from a choral treatment. But they cannot have heard this opera, nor even looked at its score. Here are all the ingredients for a great operatic venture – excellent libretto, first rate music, high drama and a well-received first broadcast. Why then have we not yet seen this opera on the stage? The published score is designated as a stage version, though the opera was written for television, so there need be no qualms about a possible production. Such a masterpiece should not remain in obscurity through the neglect of myopic impresarios.

Christopher Hassall, Bliss' great collaborator, constructed this libretto of the first

ever television opera in 1960. The story is taken from the apocryphal Book of Tobit and concerns Tobias' encounter with the Archangel Raphael, incognito. The pivotal point of the opera is the confrontation between the Angel and the demon Asmodey. The forces of light triumph and at the end of the opera the blind Tobias has his eyesight restored, glimpsing the true form of Raphael. His last words, "We have been visited", bring the opera to a close. Throughout, the score must be the most colourful that Bliss ever wrote and the composer himself claimed that it contained some of his best work.

The Beggar's Opera. See under 7. Arrangements of Other Works.

4. Choral and Song

Seven American Poems

Here are settings of Edna St. Vincent Millay and two of Elinor Wylie. The harsh quality of these songs reflects the spirit of the early forties, when they were written (1940).

Two American Poems

These two songs, *Humoresque* and *The Return from Town*, are to words by Edna St. Vincent Millay and were written in 1940, at the same time as the seven songs above. They were published in 1979, after Bliss' death.

Angels of the Mind

These settings of 1964 are all orientated to thoughts on death and conflict, curiously fitting to our present anxious century. The words are by Kathleen Raines, who also provided the text for *The Golden Cantata*, and the cycle is dedicated to her. Bliss blends philosophy and music to convey more than either would on its own. He became more concerned with this fusion of art and philosophy as he grew older, reaching a zenith in *Shield of Faith* (1974).

Aubade for Coronation Morning

The coronation year of 1953 saw the composition of many special works in honour of the occasion. This aubade forms part of a multi-composer collection entitled *A Garland for the Queen*, and owes its conception to the Tudor anthology, *The Triumph of Oriana*. It is scored for two soloists and unaccompanied full chorus, lasting some six minutes.

Two Ballads

Commissioned in 1971 for the Isle of Man schoolchildren, *The Mountain Plover* is a setting of a traditional Manx poem. *Flowers in the Valley*, to words by Edith Sitwell, forms a nice contrast and concerns a fickle maiden.

Ballads of the Four Seasons

These four songs date from 1923. There is a wonderful sense of cohesion between the vocalist and piano. The words are by Li Po and evoke some beautiful tone colours from Bliss.

The Beatitudes

This work was commissioned by the Coventry Cathedral Festival of 1962 for the opening of the rebuilt cathedral. It was conceived with the great setting of the

cathedral and its superb organ in mind, so that when the first performance was relegated to the Belgrade Theatre, it was a terrible disappointment to Bliss. Lost were the effects of space and the cathedral organ was replaced by a small electronic model of poor voicing.

Nevertheless, this is a superb cantata and possibly Bliss' best sacred choral work. Unlike Walton, Bliss refused to be tempted to compose *in modo popolare*. He set this work unbiblically interspersing the beatitudes proper with suitable poetical works. The overall effect is like jewels set in a gold mount. Each beatitude matches the others but is cut differently and of varying hue. There are twelve sections with a prelude:

Orchestral Prelude: A Troubled World. This is a violent start, perhaps conveying a sense of revulsion at man's cruelty to his own kind.

1. *The Mount of Olives* (Henry Vaughan). Here is no pastoral scene, but a hill of dignified grandeur. The gently swaying music leads to –
2. *First and Second Beatitudes.* Trumpet flourishes introduce the two soloists. The orchestral atmosphere suggests the *Temple Dance* in Elgar's *Apostles*. The chorus sings the second beatitude, echoing the soloists and the next section follows without a break.
3. *Easter* (George Herbert). These fine words have inspired many other composers, notably Vaughan Williams in his *Five Mystical Songs*. Bliss makes the movement an occasion of uninhibited rejoicing. When the two soloists enter with modulating, jagged tunes, the orchestra briefly recalls *Blue* from *A Colour Symphony*. There are some moving moments when the soprano solo begins *Awake my lute* and the harp sounds divine.
4. *I Got me Flowers* (George Herbert). This is serene and flowing music for the chorus with alleluias from the two soloists.
5. *Third Beatitude.* Shortness and simplicity prevail in this movement for soprano solo and orchestra.
6. *The Lofty Looks of Man shall be Humbled* (Isaiah II vv 10–20). This energetic movement mirrors the prophet's deliverance of the words. The orchestration bears comparison with that of the *Valley of the Shadow of Death* in *Meditations on a Theme by John Blow*.
7. *Fourth Beatitude.* The words are tranquilly introduced by the two soloists, then taken up by full chorus. Bliss makes use of Negro spiritual style harmony here, but only fleetingly.
8. *The Call* (George Herbert). "With devotion" Bliss has written on the page. Again we hear a faint recourse to the Negro spiritual. The music becomes a series of short variations.

Interlude (orchestral). Bliss brings us back to our own time and problems with the same violence that began the work. That it should be sandwiched between two peaceful sections is typical of Bliss' sense of paradox. The message of the beatitudes may appear passive, but it takes a fighting mind to give them an active quality.

9. *Fifth – Eighth Beatitudes.* Here is the most lyrical part of the work.
10. *And Death shall have no Dominion* (Dylan Thomas). Here is a ghastly picture of violence and anger, based on the word 'persecute'. Bliss possibly uses this violent music to shake the listener's apathy.
11. *Ninth Beatitude.* The soloists sing the beatitude itself but are followed hotly by the mob, shouting at Christ at his trial. It ends in utter horror as the chorus are directed to shout 'KILL' – a perfect picture of mass hysteria.

12. *Epilogue: O Blessed Jesu* (Jeremy Taylor). Again the paradox; after the chaos of the mob the work passes into a peaceful prayer of supplication to Christ, asking for the Spirit to put his words into practice. The cantata ends predictably with an Amen chorus but one of rare beauty and joy.

Birthday Song for a Royal Child

C. Day Lewis' words are set for unaccompanied chorus. The work was composed for the occasion of the birth of Prince Andrew in 1959.

Cradle Song for a Newborn Child

For chorus and harp (or piano), this was written for the birth of Prince Edward and was first performed in 1964.

Elegiac Sonnet

A poignant homage to the memory of the gifted pianist, Noel Mewton-Wood, this was written in 1954 and first performed by Peter Pears with Benjamin Britten and the Zorian Quartet.

The Enchantress

Described by Bliss as a 'Scena for contralto and orchestra', it is dedicated to Kathleen Ferrier, who gave its first performance with the BBC Northern Orchestra under Charles Groves in 1951. What a pity that this occasion does not seem to have been recorded!

The text was adapted from the *Second Idyll of Theocritus* by Henry Reed. It tells the story of Simaetha, a proud Syracusan lady, who has been deserted by her lover, Delphis. In her despair she turns to witchcraft to win back her love. A short, vehement introduction leads to the opening lines, where Simaetha calls for her slave girl to bring the magical ingredients for the brew. Throughout the ritual invoking Hecate she muses on her happy times with Delphis, but this only makes her more determined. She ends her invocation on a note of anticipated triumph.

The Golden Cantata

Kathleen Raine's words are set in a sequence arranged to 'glow pleasingly, in the fashion of gold'. Unlike Bliss' other cantatas, this one is secular. It was written for the quincentenary of the granting of the first Cambridge music degree in 1464. The poet writes, "The sequence of poems attempts to suggest the evolution of music and how this follows evolution in the world itself. First of articulate life, then of consciousness and finally of Orphic utterance".

The cantata is scored for a large orchestra and full chorus with tenor solo. It was first performed in 1964 at the Cambridge Guildhall, with Bliss himself conducting. There are eight closely linked sections. It opens *Andante misterioso* with the chorus humming above a quiet orchestral background, punctuated by odd percussion sounds like exploding lights. The whole effect is arcane like an aeolian harp. In these first pages Bliss demonstrated that he could still be quite an adventurer.

The second section contains devices bringing to mind Olivier Messiaen's bird song music and Bliss used them again in *Shield of Faith*. Other orchestral phrases echo passages in *Morning Heroes*. The cantata ends as it began, with a quiet, humming chorus, dying away *niente*.

Hymn Tunes

Bliss wrote three hymn tunes: *Pen Selwood*, *Mortlake* and *Santa Barbara*. *Pen Selwood* and *Santa Barbara* were written for the Cambridge Hymnal of 1967, the former to words by the sixteenth century poet, George Herbert, and the latter to a text by W. H. Auden. *Mortlake* to words by Brian Wren, was written for the supplement to the American Episcopal Hymnal of 1940.

A Knot of Riddles

This song cycle for baritone and eleven instruments was written in 1963 for the Cheltenham Festival. Bliss had seen a number of old English riddles in a copy of *The Listener*, originating from the medieval library of Exeter Cathedral. These puzzles, dating from the eighth century, draw on various subjects from nature and common domestic use. Without spoiling the pleasure of the musical riddles, it suffices to say that Bliss' music is often a better clue than the words.

Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle

This setting of Psalm XV was written for the dedication of the shrine of the Knights Bachelor in St. Bartholomew's Priory Church, Smithfield, in 1968.

Madame Noy. See Page 7.

Mar Portugues

This *pièce d'occasion* was commissioned by Edward Heath, when he was Prime Minister, for the 60th anniversary of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. The words are from a Portuguese poem, *Portuguese Sea*. It was first performed in the Painted Hall of Greenwich Naval College, the two bodies of singers standing either side of the top of the staircase. The conductor was Martin Neary.

Mary of Magdala

The Feeney Trust commissioned this work for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to play at the Three Choirs Festival held in Worcester Cathedral in 1963. Christopher Hassall constructed the libretto, taking the biblical story of the Resurrection morning and adding words by Sherburne and Roland Watkins. It is dedicated to Hassall, whose tragic death occurred a few months before the first performance. The premier, with Bliss himself conducting, was received with enthusiasm so it is surprising that the work should have been so neglected.

Early morning is invoked by the chorus. Bliss uses a delicate rhythmic device to depict Mary running to the sepulchre. On her way she sings a lovely aria. *At last the Sabbath is over, and love may draw near him*. She laments over the last resting place of the true Rose of Sharon. She casts her mind back, recalling her act of homage in anointing His feet with costly ointment, and how the disciples rebuked her. But Christ spoke kindly, accepting the homage as a prophetic and symbolic act.

After a sequence of choral interjections illustrating the story she arrives at the door of the tomb, and to her horror finds the body gone. Two angels tell her "He is not here" and as she turns, she sees through her tears a man whom she supposes to be the gardener. When she asks him where she might find the body, he answers quietly. "Mary, Mary". This section is most effectively orchestrated with no blasts of revelation, but a moment of realisation dawning. There follows a happy choral apotheosis of Christ as the Heavenly Gardener.

Morning Heroes. A Choral Symphony.

This work sums up the whole character and musicality of Arthur Bliss. It was conceived virtually as a requiem for his brother, Kennard, who fell on the Somme, and for all those who died in the Great War. Bliss himself did not escape the touch of Mars; he was gassed and wounded, though his spirit was certainly undaunted. Nevertheless, he was profoundly affected by what had happened around him. "Asrael's shadow" passed over his brow again in later years in the form of a dream. He and his company would be back in the trenches fighting on, though the war had officially ended. It was as if he were caught in time.

Morning Heroes was therefore a kind of exorcism, and in the music his subconscious feelings broke out, relieving the burden. The work is Bliss' largest scale piece, with a speaker as well as full orchestra and chorus. The first movement is for orchestra and speaker alone. The words are Hector's farewell to Andromache from the *Iliad*. One can see from the score that careful timing is needed between the orchestra and the orator – it is almost a concerto.

The City Arming is the next movement and it follows without a break. The text is from Whitman's *Drum-Taps*. A stirring martial chorus describes the departure for battle. There is a touching passage on the parting of families – "The mother kisses her son" – and the orchestra throbbing like a funeral march makes the moment even more moving.

The third movement, *Vigil*, uses words by Li-Tai-Po and tells of a lovesick and unhappy wife bewailing her absent warrior husband. There follows another part of *Drum-Taps*, "By the bivouac's fitful flame", when Bliss conveys the tension of the waiting before the battle, and the anxiety of the soldiers thinking of the homes and loved ones. After a short orchestral introduction comes "Achilles goes forth to battle" from the *Iliad*. Bliss uses the chorus to portray the glories of war, though he was fully aware of the contrast between this sort of writing and the tragedy that surrounded it in the symphony.

The Heroes is a choral list of the heroes of the Trojan War and leads into *Spring Offensive*. Wilfred Owen's words are spoken by the orator with carefully timed outbursts on the drums. This effect is a stroke of genius. It gives very simply, but oh so vividly, a sense of the horror and destruction perpetrated during the Great War.

A plaintive orchestral passage leads to the finale, *Dawn on the Somme*. This is a most curious juxtaposition. Bliss works up the chorus to a thrilling and almost joyful climax, only to shatter it by the rattling of sten-guns and flying shrapnel. But this is quite in keeping with the overall effect of the work on the listener. The apparent paradox can only be resolved in the mind of the listener. The work conveys a sense of hope in the human condition; that by reminding us of the effects of war, we may yet turn from it.

Two Nursery Rhymes

These early songs date from 1920. Both *The Ragwort* and *The Dandelion* have a delightful freshness, typical of Bliss' early period. They are scored for soprano and clarinet, but there also exists an arrangement for voice and viola, made with Bliss' approval by Lionel Tertis.

One, Two, Buckle my Shoe

This setting of the familiar nursery rhyme was written for the very young members of the Orpington Junior Singers in 1968.

Ode for Sir William Walton

This was commissioned by the Rt. Hon. Edward Heath, during his term as Prime Minister, to celebrate the 70th birthday of the younger composer (1972). The words are by Walton's close friend and collaborator, Paul Dehn.

O Give Thanks unto the Lord

Among the Channel Islands is situated one of the smallest autonomous states of Britain, Sark. This anthem celebrates the granting in 1565 of the charter which gave the island its greater measure of independence. It was first performed at a Thanksgiving Service on Sark in 1965.

Put Thou thy Trust in the Lord

Described as an introit for double choir, this was commissioned for the Silver Wedding Service of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II and Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh. Performed in Westminster Abbey on the 20th November, 1972, it is a stirring work full of the spirit of ceremony and occasion, yet conveying a sense of the eternal. Once again Bliss brings together the essential elements for the occasion.

Pastoral. Lie strewn White Flocks

Elgar, to whom the work is dedicated, found it puzzling but promising, and wrote to Bliss very encouragingly about it. It is undoubtedly Bliss' most appealing choral work, being both excitingly robust and lyrically romantic in style. It is in eight sections drawn from various literary sources, producing a very classical atmosphere:

1. *The Shepherd's Holyday* (Ben Jonson). A lyrical orchestral introduction leads into this celebration of May Day, with Bliss' marked technique of syncopation very much to the fore, and illustrating a dance measure.
2. *Hymn to Pan* (John Fletcher). This is an intentionally archaic sounding rite with much primitive foot stamping.
3. *Pan's Sarabande*. Really a miniature concerto for flute and small orchestra.
4. *Pan and Echo* (Poliziano). The tenors and basses sing Pan's words as he laments his hopeless love for Echo. Bliss uses the women's chorus as the voice of Echo, subtly changing the last word of Pan's utterance. This is the sort of tune that Bliss turned out in apparently effortless fashion and is just as easily remembered.
5. *The Naiads' Music* (Robert Nichols). Yet another of those delightful, but elusive Bliss melodies for the song of the water sprites.
6. *The Pigeon Song* (Robert Nichols). This is the only part for the mezzo-soprano soloist. It is a love song, addressed to a pigeon, in the hope that it might carry a message to the lover, a shepherd.
7. *Song of the Reaper* – a virile, throbbing reaper's song with some catchy rhythms, a hymn to Demeter, the Earth Mother. The words are from Theocritus.
8. *Finale*. An orchestral interlude, possibly depicting sunset and twilight, heralds *The Shepherd's Night Song*, evocative of evening with its pleasures and peace.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

St. Francis was a lover of simplicity, and I believe he would have approved of this unaccompanied setting of his prayer for sopranos and altos. It was written in 1972 for the Orpington Junior Singers and is dedicated to the memory of Sheila Mossman.

A Prayer to the Infant Jesus

This is another of several works written for the Orpington Junior Singers, under their conductor, Sheila Mossman, and was first performed in 1968. The text is a traditional prayer to the Infant of Prague. The parts are for sopranos and altos only and give the work a very youthful timbre.

Rhapsody

This short work for soprano, tenor, flute, English horn, string quartet and double bass was one of Bliss' early 'avant-garde' works, dating from 1919. One wonders if Bliss had heard any Delius, as this work has much in common with *Song of the High Hills*, where the choral line vocalises on 'ah' throughout. The Delius work does predate the *Rhapsody* by a few years, so Bliss may have borrowed the format for his own chamber work. It is dedicated to the tenor, Gerald Cooper, who sang in its first performance in 1920.

River Music

This short, unaccompanied choral work was written as a commission for the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1967. It was first performed there by the Ambrosian Singers, conducted by Bliss. The words are by C. Day Lewis and are in praise of the Thames.

Seek the Lord

This anthem for choir and organ was written for the centenary service of the Missions to Seamen at Westminster Abbey on February 20th, 1956. Bliss manages to convey the feeling of a stormy sea, but with a note of triumph at the close.

Serenade for Baritone and Orchestra

Bliss often said that much of his inspiration came from non-musical sources, as it did in this case. He was sitting in an art gallery looking at a picture of an 18th century garden with figures. He was moved to revive the tradition of the vocal serenata, in which the lover sings songs of courtship to his beloved. This serenade is in the form of two love songs preceded by an overture depicting the swashbuckling nature of the lover, and separated by an orchestral idyll. It was written in 1929 and dedicated to his wife. The three sections have subsequently been arranged by the composer for baritone and piano (*Tune on my Pipes* and *Two Love Songs*, 1929).

Shield of Faith

This cantata for chorus, soprano, baritone and organ was written for the quincentenary of St. George's Chapel, Windsor. It was dedicated, by gracious permission, to Her Majesty the Queen and was first performed at Windsor in 1975. Bliss writes, "I would like to express gratitude to Dr. Sydney Campbell, MVO, the late organist of St. George's, for allowing me to spend a day at the organ there, and for advising me on the registration noted down here" (in the score).

The work begins with a fierce organ introduction leading into William Dunbar's *The Lord is Risen*. Full choir bursts in with the words, "Done is the battel on the dragon blak". The last line of the poem is in Latin, "Surrexit Dominus de Sepulchro", and is almost a separate movement, starting with a fanfare phrase on the trumpet stop. There is much Tudor style embellishment in this section. Next follows an interlude, *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, a duet for the two soloists. The opening Gloria

uses a theme which has already appeared in the first chorus. It is totally unaccompanied, making a wonderful Monteverdian contrast. The next section, *Love*, to words by George Herbert, follows without a break. A contemplative organ introduction begins, then the chorus floats mysteriously in, like ripples on a pool. There follows a setting of words by Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*. Again the organ introduces the section, this time in an agitated mood. Bliss' setting enhances the flow of Pope's marvellous words. A delightful dance-like rhythm appears at the words "Behold nature's kindly law".

The two soloists sing Tennyson's *O yet we trust*. This pours past like a stream and Bliss makes interesting use of descending glissandi for voices on the final word "cry". Lastly comes what is no doubt the finest part of the work. Set to T. S. Elliot's *Little Gidding*, beautiful organ themes accompany the soprano solo with full chorus in echo. The organ is used imaginatively throughout. The baritone solo has a sensitively lyrical passage beginning at "through the unknown", leading to a section marked *Scherzando* (quasi birdsong). This type of aural display has also been used to great effect by Britten in his *Spring Symphony* and Messiaen in *Les Oiseaux*. The work ends in a brilliant finale, perfectly fitting:

"When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one."

Sing, Mortals!

Richard Tydeman's words provide the text for this joyful outburst. On November 26th 1974, the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Holborn, held its festival service on St. Cecilia's Day. Indeed with four major church choirs participating it must have sounded very imposing. Taking part were: St. Paul's Cathedral Choir, Westminster Abbey Choir, Choir of the Chapels Royal, and that of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Holborn.

Song of Welcome

This used words by C. Day Lewis, specially written for the occasion of Her Majesty the Queen's return from her Commonwealth tour in 1953. A ten bar flourish introduces the welcoming chorus. Baritone and soprano soloists join with 'Tilting airfields rose to meet you', echoed by the chorus with much cheering. Following this is a tranquil section where the soloists reflect on the binding spirit of the Commonwealth (somewhat outmoded these days). Lastly the welcoming chorus returns, ending in great exuberance.

The first performance was broadcast by the BBC, with Joan Sutherland and Ian Wallace, and was conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent.

Three Songs for Girls' or Boys' Voices

In 1969 Bliss wrote these three songs for the Orpington Junior Singers. The first, *Little Bingo*, is a nursery rhyme of the spelling-out type and bounces along gleefully like the little dog it describes. Number two, *A Widow Bird Sate Mourning*, is of a more tragic nature, with wordless glissandi conveying the feel of icy winter winds. The last song is a seasonal carol with entertaining 'bugle' parts for the singers.

- Four Songs*
1. *A Christmas Carol* (A. S. Cripps)
 2. *Sea Love* (Charlotte Mew)
 3. *Vocalise*
 4. *The Mad Woman of Punnet's Town*

Only number 2 has been published. It is a short, dramatic song in an odd dialect.

Three Songs (W. H. Davies settings)

These songs are dedicated to Elizabeth Poston. The first, *Thunderstorms*, is not about natural phenomena, but those of the mind. It uses words as rain. The second, *This Night*, is a macabre picture of an owl in Highgate Wood posing an eternal question and answering with effective but unsteretyped hoots. The last song, *Leisure*, is the most spirited of the set and contains the most memorable tune.

Three Romantic Songs

The first of these settings of Walter de la Mare is *The Hare*, which makes use of leaping phrases of six notes that turn into a scamper as the hare is startled. *Lovelocks* uses another repetitive phrase, three notes descending. It occurs throughout the song and no doubt symbolised the fickle Lady Caroline brushing her hair. *The Buckle* is an imaginative treatment of de la Mare's youthful picture of a girl anticipating the pleasures of life yet to come.

Bliss wrote a number of single songs, varying from children's songs with simple piano accompaniment to very complex works for chamber ensemble:

At the Window. c. 1925; words by Tennyson.

Auvergnat. 1943; words by Hilaire Belloc.

A Child's Prayer. 1926; for the composer's eldest daughter; words by Sassoon.

The fallow deer at the lonely house. 1924; a setting of Thomas Hardy.

The Hammers. c. 1915; words by Ralph Hodgson.

Pack clouds away. There remain just two draft sections of the beginning of the song.

Rich or Poor. 1925–6; words by W. H. Davies.

Sailing or flying. 1970; a children's song by Winifred Williams.

Simples. 1932; words by James Joyce.

Three jolly gentlemen. 1923; words by Walter de la Mare.

Song of a man who has come through. a setting of words by D. H. Lawrence, it was left unfinished at the composer's death.

'Tis time I think by Wenlock Town. c. 1914; an A. E. Housman setting.

The Tramps. c. 1916; words by Robert Service.

Tulips. 1970; a children's song, by Winifred Williams.

When I was one and twenty. 1923; another A. E. Housman setting. It was published by Ricordi of New York, but has since been lost.

Stand up and bless the Lord your God

When Llandaff Cathedral restoration was completed in 1960, Bliss composed this complex anthem for the special service on August 6th. It includes parts for soprano and baritone soloists.

The Women of Yueh

This is a cycle of five short songs, with words by Li Po. They were written in 1923 for

the New York Composers League. There is a porcelain delicacy to all of Bliss' settings from the Chinese . . . a semi-translucent vocal line shifts effortlessly against a willow pattern accompaniment by chamber orchestra. The work is dedicated to Ernest Ansermet.

The world is charged with the Grandeur of God

This is a short cantata, commissioned for the Aldeburgh Festival of 1969. It is dedicated to Sir Peter Pears, who selected the poems for Bliss. It is in three sections, the middle one for women's voices and two flutes, and the two others for mixed chorus and brass choir.

5. Chamber and Instrumental Music

Allegro. c. 1927.

This appears to be an unfinished manuscript, scored for string quartet.

Bliss: One step for Piano

This work dates from 1923. It was later orchestrated by Leighton Lucas and Victor Fleming for use as an interlude between ballets at the Markova-Dolin season in 1936.

Conversations

In the mood of 'Les Six', with wit bordering on sarcasm, *Conversations* burst onto the London scene in 1920. It is scored for chamber ensemble and, like *Rout*, was intended to "enliven a musical evening in a big house". Certainly it enlivened the evening of its first performance at the Aeolian Hall, to the point of open hostility from some of the critics.

That concert included works by Poulenc, Milhaud and Tailleferre – formidable companions. The Daily Mail of April 4th 1921, had a field day, comparing vocal contributions in the concert to a Dadaist vision. Today Dadaism has become an institution and so has Bliss, though neither have lost their impact. Both provided pivots in their respective art forms.

Conversations is in five movements, each illustrating an impression of verbal discourse held in particular and contrasting circumstances:

1. *The Committee Meeting*. We have all been to one like this! The chairman states the aim and purpose of the meeting in a drone, but is interrupted constantly, so that by the end of the movement, he is no further forward.
2. *In the Wood*. A lyrical interchange between two lovers.
3. *In the Ballroom*. Bass flute assumes terpsichorean supremacy without any overtones of Strauss.
4. *Soliloquy*. Cor Anglais as Hamlet, perhaps, providing a melancholy air.
5. *In the Tube at Oxford Circus*. Have you ever tried talking in a closely packed tube in the rush hour? The results are amusing; people tend to shout until the train stops. The bustle of passengers and the shouted rejoinders lend wit to the composer's pen.

Enid's Blast (1968)

Enid (Bliss' sister) must have been amused by this witty little thing for trumpet and piano. Bliss included the tune in *A Wedding Suite*, which was written for the occasion of her marriage in 1974.

Fugue for string quartet

This has been lost. It was written for the Elgar Fugue Competition sponsored by *The Music Student*. Bliss wrote of it, "I intended to write a phantasy of three movements, but time has only allowed me to complete the first and give an inkling of the second". (Bliss was on active service at the time)

Fun & Games

This duet for two pianos (three hands) is dedicated to Cyril Smith and Phyllis Sellick. The music is a re-arrangement of the night club scene in *Adam Zero*. It was written in 1970.

Two Interludes

Though both are marked '*Moderato*', they differ greatly in mood. The first is dedicated to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (who, later, was to commission Bliss to write his oboe quintet). The second is to Ethel Roe Eicheim. Both date from 1925.

Intermezzo for piano

Composed around 1912, this is one of the works that Bliss withdrew as being unrepresentative of his oeuvre.

Karen's Piece

Just a simple delight that many composers produce for their own family occasions. It was written around 1940 when Bliss' younger daughter was learning to play the violin and piano.

Masks I-IV

Here are four distinctly 'theatrical' conceptions for the piano. Each one has a character unique to itself: a comedy mask, a romantic mask, a sinister mask, and a military mask. This set was composed in 1924 and is dedicated to Felix Goodwin. Arthur Benjamin gave the first performance in 1926.

May-Zeeh

Described by the composer as a "Valse for piano", dedicated to an early acquaintance, it sounds very trite and uncharacteristic as do many early works of any composer. It dates around 1910, so is one of the earliest surviving works of Bliss.

Miniature Scherzo

This humorous work is based on a phrase from the celebrated violin concerto by Mendelssohn. It was composed in 1969 for the 125th year of the Musical Times, and is dedicated to Marguerite Wolff.

Two pieces for Clarinet & Piano

These date from around 1916. Only the *Pastoral* survives: its companion *Rhapsody* is missing.

Praeludium

This is the only work that Bliss wrote for the organ. All other items currently played have been arranged by others. It dates from 1971, being written for Fred Tulan, an

American organist of superb calibre. It has optional parts for a small battery of percussion, a very adventurous combination. In good resonant acoustics it is very effective, but is better played as an organ solo.

The String Quartets

Although Bliss wrote four String Quartets, one was withdrawn by the composer at a later date. This was the first to be written and dated from around 1914. The second Quartet was written around 1923/4 but is in manuscript only. It does not appear to have been performed publicly.

This leaves us with two. These are String Quartet No. 1 (1941) and String Quartet No. 2 (1950). The numbers are the composers. No. 1 is dedicated to Mrs Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, and No. 2 to the Griller Quartet who subsequently recorded both.

Bliss used two movements from No. 2 (2 & 3) in an orchestrated form in the later work *Two Contrasts for String Orchestra*.

Piano Quartet in A minor Op. 5

Though published by Novello in 1915, Bliss withdrew the score at a later date. One movement was arranged by Watson Forbes for viola and piano and published in 1950 as *Intermezzo for viola and piano*.

Clarinet Quintet

This is dedicated to Bernard van Dieren, himself a composer of some consequence, though little heard today. It dates from 1932. The personality of great players often enticed Bliss to write works for them. In this case it was for Frederick Thurston. The work is in four movements. The first is in the nature of a lyrical exchange between the players. The second is an extended scherzo, both strenuous and dramatic. A rhapsodical romance follows, where Bliss manages to bring much beauty to the clarinet line. Lastly the finale is one of sprightly brilliance.

Quintet for Piano and String Quartet

Written in 1919, and first performed in Paris during that year with the composer at the piano. It was never published and the manuscript has been lost.

Oboe Quintet

This was commissioned by Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge in 1927. It was for her Venice Music Festival, the soloist being the celebrated Leon Goossens. It was given soon after in Vienna, when amongst the audience were many distinguished musical personalities of the time. Bliss was particularly pleased to have received words of praise personally from Alban Berg.

Bliss always wrote well for the woodwind, and this quintet is no exception. It breathes the same air as Elgar's beloved Malvern Hills, which Bliss had also come to appreciate.

The work is in three movements: the first is marked *Assai Sostenuto-Moderato*. The strings introduce the main theme, a gentle sweeping arch-like structure then the oboe seems to come in from a distance, taking up and developing the same theme. The second movement does not clash with the first but complements its meditative mood.

Contrast comes in the last movement, where Bliss introduces *Connelly's Jig*. This was at the suggestion of Edwin Evans, the music critic.

The Rout Trot

A slightly jazzy piece, it owes its origin to a revue called *White Birds* at His Majesty's Theatre in 1927. However it may not have been used at this production.

Suite for piano (1912)

This work comprises three sections: *Prelude*, *Ballade* and *Scherzo*. It is dedicated to Bliss' father, and is perhaps the first work to show any glimpse of what was to come from Bliss' pen in later years.

Suite for piano (1925)

This is in four movements: *Overture*, *Polonaise*, *Elegy* and *Finale*. The *Polonaise* was orchestrated by Bliss for Sir Eugene Goossens.

Play a Penta

This was specially written for Mary Priestley to use in music therapy in 1971. It is scored for violin, chime bars and piano.

Sonata for Piano & Violin

This dates from 1914, but was never finished; only sketches survive of one movement.

Piano Sonata

Written for the ill-fated Noel Mewton-Wood in 1952, it presents one of the most startling sides of Bliss' music. This is no pastoral piece set in rural England, but virile and severe in its crystalline construction, with much that reminds us of the air of Prokofiev, whose piano works Bliss admired. But there is also much in the work that looks forward to Shostakovitch and Britten.

The first movement, *Moderato marcato*, begins with an almost martial rhythmic theme, contrasted with a slower more lyrical motif. "Steely brilliance" Bliss called the overall mood. The second movement, *Adagio sereno*, is exactly what it sounds like; a slow, serene, limpid theme and variations. The third movement, *Allegro*, has again two opposing themes set in a sharp biting framework, which holds them like the interlace of a Celtic illuminated manuscript. The final passage comes in an explosion of fireworks, very difficult to execute.

Violin Sonata

This was written in 1933 for Lionel Tertis, the great viola player. Bliss says that this work became almost a concerto in proportion, and if he had the time he would translate the piano accompaniment into an orchestral texture, taking care that the mellow and sombre tones of the solo instrument were not obscured by a thick surround. It is in three movements: *Moderato*, *Andante* and *Furiant-molto allegro-Andante maestoso*.

Toccata for Piano

Like the later sonata of 1952, the toccata is extremely percussive and harsh in comparison with Bliss' earlier writing for the piano. It does contain much of the typical Bliss humour, notably in the ragtime-like section marked '*piu mosso*'

Triptych

This was written in 1970 for Louis Kentner, who gave the first performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall the following year. It is in three movements and, as the titles would infer, all are of a similar mood but achieve the effect in different ways. It brings to mind the famous triptych of Botticelli.

Valses Fantastiques

- Here are four waltzes:
1. *Allegro Amabile*
 2. *Poco piu andante*
 3. *Poco lento e molto espressivo*
 4. *Introduction-allegro vivace*

These were written in 1913 and hence are very early works. Numbers 2 and 3 were re-worked into *A Wedding Suite*, for the wedding of Bliss' sister Enid. This is also in four movements, and includes 'Enid's Blast' and parts of the march 'The fight of the Line'.

6. Fanfares and Ceremonial Music

Ceremonial Prelude

In 1965, Westminster Abbey celebrated its 900th anniversary, and this was Bliss' contribution to the Festival Service. It was the processional for the progress of Her Majesty the Queen from the West Door of the Abbey, to the shrine of St. Edward the Confessor. It is scored for brass, tubular chimes, timpani and organ. Sir Arthur conducted on that occasion.

The Fanfares

There can be no doubt that in the field of ceremonial music Bliss has surpassed all other composers in his ability to match the occasion perfectly. All of these miniatures are composed with great care, and with the intention of enhancing the occasion simply and effectively.

Fanfare for Heroes (1930)

This is probably the most widely performed. It is not strictly a fanfare, but rather a prelude and march.

Bliss also wrote several sequences of ceremonial music for specific occasions, the music of which, though very short, is often most rewarding, and deserves a better fate than just the occasional performance.

The following is a list of these fanfares and ceremonial items:

A birthday fanfare for Sir Henry Wood (1944); two versions.

Birthday greetings to the Croydon Symphony Orchestra (1971); also used as *Fanfare for a coming of age*.

Dominion Greetings (1935); BBC Programme.

Fanfare for a dignified occasion (1938).

Fanfare for a political address (1921); uses a speaker.

Fanfare for Heroes (1930).

Fanfare for the Commonwealth Arts Festival (1965).

Fanfare for the Lord Mayor of London (1967).

Fanfare for the National Fund for Crippling Diseases (1973).

Fanfare: Homage to Shakespeare (1964).

Fanfare: To precede the National Anthem (1960); Princess Margaret's Wedding.
Fanfare Prelude for Orchestra "Macclesfield" (1966). This is material from *Adam Zero*.

Gala Fanfare (1962). For the opening of the British Empire & Commonwealth Games in Australia.

Greetings to a City (1961).

High Sheriff's Fanfare (1963).

Lancaster: Prelude (1974). For 10th Anniversary of University Concerts.

Let the People sing. Two Fanfares (1960).

Peace: Fanfare for Children (1944).

Prince of Wales Investiture Music (1969).

1. *Fanfare No. 1*
2. *Interlude*
3. *Fanfare No. 2*
4. *Interlude* (No. 2 repeated)
5. *Antiphonal Fanfare*

The Right of the Line. Fanfare (1965).

Royal Fanfares & Interludes. Various dates. For Princess Margaret's Wedding 1960, revised 1965.

1. *The Sovereign's Fanfare*
2. *Fanfare for the Bride*
3. *Interlude*
4. *Royal Fanfare*
5. *A Wedding Fanfare*
6. *Royal Fanfare*

Salute to Leigh University (1968).

A Salute to Painting (1953).

Salute to the RAF (1956).

Salute to the Royal Society (1960).

Service of the Order of the Bath (1956).

1. *Introduction*
2. *Interlude No. 1*
3. *Interlude No. 2*

Three Jubilant & Three Solemn Fanfares (1943).

Princess Anne's Wedding Music (1973). Fanfare and interludes for the hymn 'Glorious things of Thee are spoken'.

A Birthday Greeting to Her Majesty (1955).

Toast of the Royal Household (1961).

A number of these fanfares appear to have been used under different titles, or in a slightly revised form:

Empire's Homage. (or *Empire's Tribute*) This is No. 1 of *Three Jubilant Fanfares*.

Founded on a Rock. No. 1 is *Fanfare for Heroes*, and No. 2 is as *Empire's Homage*.

Chatham Port Fanfare. This is *Fanfare for a Dignified Occasion*, and occurs again as *Ceremonial Fanfare*.

Processional

Considering all of the other music written by his contemporaries for the same occasion, this sounds rather strange. It was used to accompany the entry of H.M. the Queen Mother at Westminster Abbey on the occasion of her daughter's coronation. For 1953 it presents a very modern dignity, but perhaps a little too sedate?

7. Arrangements of Other Works

The Beggar's Opera (John Gay)

For the 1952–3 British Lion film of John Gay's old warhorse, Bliss was commissioned to rescore the opera for modern ears. In doing so he breathed new life into it. The original film score still survives, but is not suitable for performance in public. However, Bliss made a performing version which can be used for modern staging.

It was highly appropriate that Bliss should have been the man to rescore the work for the film. Gay in his century, by poking fun at the current conventions of Handelian/Italian opera, precipitated the new form of oratorio, which Handel developed due to the failing interest in his Italian operas. Bliss, in his music for *Things to Come*, created a new conception in film music and the technique of its total marriage to the visual.

Bach Chorales for Brass

These three chorales were arranged by Bliss for the Three Choirs Festival at Worcester in 1960. They were first played from the tower of the Cathedral in that year. Their titles are:

1. *See Him now, the Righteous One*
2. *Ah Lord, when my last end is come*
3. *Peter, in his forgetfulness, thrice denies his Master*

All are taken from the *St. John Passion*.

Das alte Jahr Vergangen ist (Bach)

This 1932 transcription for piano was made by Bliss for inclusion in *A Bach Book for Harriet Cohen*, and is dedicated to her.

Fire Dance (Christian Sinding)

Bliss orchestrated this piano piece of Sinding's in 1923 for the Karsavina ballet season at the London Coliseum. Unfortunately the manuscript has been lost.

The National Anthem; God Save the Queen

Bliss' excellent arrangement of the familiar tune puts all others totally out of joint. It was written for the Royal Choral Society's American Tour in 1969, but surpasses the occasion to such an extent as to warrant inclusion at every state function. His treatment of the brass fanfare accompaniment to the choral line is highly individual and obviously Bliss. It is not a work that can be taken slowly, but needs a crisp, cracking good pace. It is the only version of the National Anthem that actually arouses some patriotic sentiment.

Set of Act Tunes and Dances (Purcell)

These five pieces were selected from various of Purcell's stage works and arranged for orchestra in 1921. They were first performed at the Wigmore Hall on 11th June that year. The items are:

- Overture (Gordian Knot Untied)*
- Air (Distressed Innocence)*
- Sarabande (Amphitryon)*
- Minuet (Distressed Innocence)*
- Hornpipe (The Married Beau)*