

## MUSIC APPRECIATION – TUESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY – SESSION 6

Today our theme is “British Classical Music” so here is a quick overview of its evolution from the Middle Ages to the present day. In the Middle Ages, it was mainly ecclesiastical using plainchant and Gregorian chant forms. Before the Baroque period, the most noteworthy were Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Tallis and even Henry 8<sup>th</sup>. In the Baroque period, British classical music was in the mainstream of European music the most famous standout composers being Purcell and by naturalization Handel.

After Purcell, there was a decline probably due to a lack of academia, a stagnant Church of England, a lack of royal patronage and the Hanoverians pushing German music such as Mendelssohn. In awe, British composers were then more prominent in the better-paid musical theatre. An Irishman John Field, however, was well known and was the inventor of the “nocturne”.

In Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries England was regarded as the land without music. The turning point began in the nineteenth century when classical music was recognized as part of our culture and became better organized. It was put on a more professional footing by the creation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1822 followed later by the Guildhall School of Music. By the end of the century, there was Covent Garden and the Royal Albert Hall with the promenade concerts beginning in 1895. Composers such as Bennett, Dunhill, Parry, Stainer and Sullivan, who was a serious composer, besides writing operettas, carried on the “romantic tradition” heralding in a whole swathe of “modern composers” such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Coleridge Taylor and Benjamin Britten all of whose music we shall shortly play.



**GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL (1685–1759).** A major composer of opera, oratorios and concerti. Parents tried to dissuade this child prodigy from pursuing a musical career but he pressed on regardless. Very rich. Became a British citizen in 1717 and dominated British music. His music has been played at all the Coronations since 1727 and was also used as the theme tune for the Champions League. We are to hear “Arrival of the Queen of Sheba” part of his opera “Solomon”. Written in 1749, it is hardly ever performed in its entirety but this piece formed part of the opening of the 2012 London Olympics.

[Ken to play via Bluetooth – 3.11 mins](#)

**RICHARD ADDINSELL (1904–1971).** He was an English composer best known for his film music – in particular his “Warsaw Concerto” composed in 1941 for the film “Dangerous Moonlight” (also known as Suicide Squadron). The plot and music are not dissimilar to “Dream of Olwen” which we played previously. He went down from Law College and then Royal College of Music after just two terms. Cutting his teeth informally and gaining his musical knowledge in Berlin and Vienna. Prolific but many of his scores have been lost. Estranged from friends he withdrew from public life and spent more than 10 years living with a male partner.

THE WARSAW CONCERTO. I have chosen to play a piano transcription. The piece has been recorded over 100 times and sold over 3 million copies. The film company asked Rachmaninoff to write the score but he was not interested. This piece is written very much as if it was composed by Rachmaninoff himself. Still riding high in the Classic Hall of Fame.

John to play on the piano - 3 mins



**EDWARD ELGAR (1857-1934).** The picture often painted of Elgar is of a social outsider, a devout Catholic, snubbed by the musical establishment and then through the sheer force of his music moving in high places, even royalty. Partially true perhaps. Unlike his contemporaries Stanford and Sullivan he was not from a privileged background. His father owned a piano shop in Worcester and his mother came from farming stock. Completely self-taught. He was a violist and organist but was not really recognised until aged 42. He wrote “The Enigma Variations” but had many interests outside music eg keen cyclist, golfer, amateur scientist, race goer and Wolves supporter Knighted by Edward VII in 1904. He married Alice in 1889 – his driving force and eight years his elder. Extremely well-read, fond of japes and wordplays. His 9<sup>th</sup> Enigma variation has the initials AJJ – his friend Jaeger which is German for “hunter” and hence “Nimrod”

John will play a short transcription of Nimrod - 2 mins

He was not particularly religious but wrote three famous oratorios besides his memorable Pomp and Circumstances marches and he was lucky that Worcester hosted alongside Gloucester and Hereford the 3 Choirs Festival. However, his wife decided they should move to London. We shall hear his Cello Concert popularized by Jacqueline Du Pre which is a masterpiece. Almost his last piece which was composed in 1919. His wife died a year later. His music became unfashionable until the 1960s. I will now play a snatch from “Salut D’Amour” dedicated to his wife as an engagement present before we listen to the tape.

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 7.51 mins

**HUBERT PARRY (1848–1918).** A 1st Baronet. Born in Bournemouth. Great sailor. Old Etonian. 7 years as a London underwriter before transferring to a musical vocation as a composer, teacher and musical historian. Music was very conventional and much influenced by Mendelssohn. He spent his middle-aged years as a Music Professor at the Royal College of Music. His students included Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Holst and Frank Bridge. Best-known works are “Jerusalem” and the anthem “I was Glad” from Vivat Rexi.

JERUSALEM was Composed in 1917 from words by William Blake written in 1810 conveying the message that a revisit by Jesus to England will create a new heaven in contrast to England’s dark satanic mills. It is effectively the National Anthem of England with George V preferring it to “God Save the King” We shall now hear the work performed with the version orchestrated by Elgar

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 4.10 mins

**JOHN RUTTER (1945-)**. English composer and conductor of religious choral works although not religious himself. Pianist from age 5. After living above a pub in the Marylebone Road, he read music at Cambridge. Prolific and eclectic composer. A music workaholic but took 7 years out after contracting ME. Some regard his music as lightweight mawkishly sentimental and neither classical nor pop. I think he is seriously underrated as he has great melodic invention and orchestration. We have previously heard his Shepherd's Pipe Carol. Now we will hear "Beauty of the Earth" an anthem composed in 1980 in 2/2 time. Happy, lively and with some syncopation.

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 2.54 mins



**BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1976)**. A colossus and internationally possibly Britain's most famous composer. Transformed British opera. Sensitive he did not like criticism. Pacifist. Homosexual with a lifelong relationship with Peter Pears with whom he founded the Aldeburgh Festival. Frank Bridge was an early tutor. His music is evocative of East Anglia and the Sea. The first composer to be awarded a life peerage.

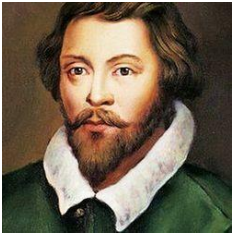
We are to hear from one of his more popular works but first, some facts about Henry Purcell (1659- 1695). He was the most famous British composer before Elgar. He attended Westminster School and was later organist at Westminster Abbey. Reputedly a snob. Combined in his Baroque music elements of Italian and French to form his expressive English style. Composed for Church and opera. Benjamin Britten cleverly used one of his themes from the Abdelezabar suite in his Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (1945)

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 3.33 mins

**GERALD FINZI (1901–1956)**. Best known as a choral composer but also wrote concerti. During his early life, he lost his father a successful shipbroker and three brothers which contributed to his rather bleak views on life. Privately educated and an agnostic of Jewish descent. More prolific in the War and Postwar years. Music typically bucolic English. A huge library setting poems by Thomas Hardy and Rossetti to music - also known for saving rare apple varieties from extinction. Died early from then incurable Hodgkins disease.

We are to hear O MISTRESS MINE: From his song cycle "Let us Garlands Bring" with text from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night and dedicated to Vaughan Willams who with others he knew from the Three Choirs Festival

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 3.29 mins



**THOMAS TALLIS (1505-1585)** Wrote High Renaissance music for all Tudor Kings except for Henry VII. Wisely did not take sides between Catholic and Protestant faiths. An entrepreneur and innovator – he acquired a patent to print/publish music. The bulk of his music is choral with orchestra. It incorporated the older Latin motet with the newer English anthem style. His most famous work is “Spem in Alium”

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 9.56 mins

**RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)**. Related to Charles Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood. Agnostic socialist. Extremely friendly with Gustav Holst. Played both violin and piano and great collector of folk songs. Music quintessentially English with a bucolic feel He got his inspiration from Ravel and Wagner with whom he studied in 1908. He was quite slowly recognized. We have already played his “Lark Ascending” and will shortly be listening to his variations of a Theme by Thomas Tallis (see above). This is number 3 in the Classic Hall of Fame and was commissioned in 1910 by the Three Choirs Festival.

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 5.32 mins

**SIR KARL JENKINS ( 1944-)**. Welsh conductor and composer. Taught piano by his father a local organist and choirmaster. Best known originally for jazz, he manages to fuse different genres of music ranging from ethnic, popular, classical and jazz. His music is truly pluralist. Having previously heard “Benedictus” from the acclaimed “Armed Man for Peace” we will turn to an earlier work a Song entitled “Adiemus” composed back in 1994. He made up the word not realising that in Latin it means “we will draw near”. It combines African and Celtic melodies.

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 4.03 mins



**ARTHUR SULLIVAN ( 1842 – 1900)**. Came from a musical background and at age 14 won a Mendelssohn scholarship at the Royal College of Music. Early on a music teacher. A talented composer but had trouble balancing his yearning for composer respectability with his love of the good life and the fat cheques that paid for it, so he turned to writing operettas albeit great ones rather than the symphonies they said he had in him. His one grand opera “Ivanhoe” was a flop although his song “The Lost Chord” was a success. Collaborated with W S Gilbert and later Richard F’Oyley Carte. We shall play when the Foeman Bares his Steel from the Pirates of Penzance

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 4.54 mins

**WILLIAM WALTON (1902- 1983)**. Impoverished family. Learnt violin and piano. Sent down from Oxford having failed his exams three times Earned a precarious income as a jazz pianist meanwhile writing music in the Sitwell's attic. Painstakingly slow - long periods with composer’s block. Portsmouth Point and Belshazzars Feast made him well known. Keenly interested in the music of Stravinsky, Sibelius and Debussy. We are to hear a very short excerpt

from Façade a work he composed based on the work of Edith Sitwell in 1923. It is quite jazzy, even jokey

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 2.28 mins

**THOMAS ARNE (1710–1778)** - we cannot forget him as he wrote “Rule Britannia” as well as “A Hunting We Will Go”

Break



**SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1771–1834)**. Mixed descent. Croydonian. Parents named him after the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge who also influenced his life of composition. Child violinist and Royal College of Music from age 15. Music has a strong African flavour eg Deep River. Several of his pieces were revived at this year’s proms. Politically active but well enough known to be invited to the White House in his short

lifetime. Previously he had written Hiwatha Wedding Feast but sold the publishing rights to a music publisher for a paltry sum before the work became famous. His case with others led to the “Performing Rights Society “ being formed

We are to play his “Ballad for Orchestra” which Elgar asked him to write for the Three Choirs Festival

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 11.15 mins

**ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER (1948)**. Requiem won the 1986 Grammy Award for Best Classical Contemporary Composition. The most popular segment of Requiem has been the Pie Jesu, which became a hit single and has been recorded by numerous artists.

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 3.55 mins



**GUSTAV HOLST (1874-1934)**. Came from a long line of musicians. Born in Cheltenham, with a Swedish father and British mother Trombonist until neuritis stopped him from playing. He then went on to study composition at the RCM. Loved Gilbert and Sullivan and went on to revive Purcell. He taught music for many years at St Paul’s Girls School Hammersmith and then Morley

College Bax introduced him to astronomy from whence he came to write the Planets Suite in 1918. A lifelong friend of Vaughan Williams. Married Isobel Holst. Very shy man. Wrote a wide range of music ie orchestral, choral and opera.

We are to hear Jupiter from the Planets Suite - number 7 in the Classic Hall of Fame. The Planets is not a work about astronomy but rather astrology. It has any number of hummable tunes including I vow to thee my country Jupiter is the ringer of jollity.

Ken to play via Bluetooth – 8.20 mins