

Delius: the 150th Anniversary Celebrations

the **Delius** society

Lionel Carley

The distinguished musicologist, whose two-volume editorship of the complete letters of the composer has formed the basis for all modern scholarship regarding Delius and his work, here outlines the announced international plans marking the sesquicentenary of the composer's birth.

Delius was born 150 years ago on 29 January 1862. The last major Delius anniversary to be widely commemorated was in 1984, fifty years after the composer's death. 1984 was shared with Elgar and Holst, both of whom had died in the same year, but 2012 will be very different, with Delius's music being celebrated on a far wider scale – and not just in the land of his birth.

The birthday itself – 29 January – sees a concert given at 3.00pm in the Royal Festival Hall. Sir Andrew Davis conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra in *Brigg Fair*, and Julian Lloyd Webber is the soloist in Delius's Cello Concerto. Works by Elgar and Vaughan Williams make up the programme. Then at 6.30pm at the Conway Hall the Fitzwilliam Quartet can be heard in the string quartets of Delius and Grieg, together with works by Percy Grainger. At 7.00pm Ken Russell's classic film *Song of Summer* will be screened in the Royal Festival Hall, and the film-maker himself will be the central figure in a panel discussion that follows the showing. Meanwhile the complement of concerts given on the actual birthday is made up by Tasmin Little and Akira Eguchi, who will be playing some of Delius's violin and piano works in Philadelphia.

The year will have already started ser-

iously, however, in Florida (where Delius spent a year and a half or so of his life). Stefan Sanderling conducts *Sea Drift* and *Appalachia* in a festival series of three subscription concerts in St Petersburg and Clearwater – with associated celebratory activities – on 6, 7 and 8 January. Naxos will be recording both works.

In quite another St Petersburg, the Russians are celebrating 100 years of British music with *Musica Britannica*, a chamber music series that started in September 2011 and that continues until July 2012. Delius is featured in the programmes of three concerts in May and June.

Attractive events on 8 January have Raphael Wallfisch and John York combining Delius cello works with the Cello Sonata by Grieg at the Wigmore Hall; while in Worthing's Assembly Hall Julian Lloyd Webber again gives the Cello Concerto, with the Worthing Symphony Orchestra under its conductor John Gibbons – who is, incidentally, to be congratulated on his recent election to the chairmanship of the British Music Society. Julian will be playing Delius's cello works widely throughout the year – a visit to his website is recommended.

Delius's breakthrough work, the tone poem *Paris* will see at least four performances in England, at Epsom on 3 March, Cambridge on 16 June, Sheffield on 30 June and at the Cheltenham Music Festival on 6 July. A performance of the incidental music to *Hassan* is also scheduled for the festival.

Perhaps oddly, few performances have yet to be confirmed of the violin works, but Tamsin Waley-Cohen, accompanied by Jakob Fichert, pair, very appropriately, the less-frequently given Sonata in B with music by Grieg at the Fairfield Halls, Croydon, on 24 April. And the Concerto for Violin and Cello will be given, in Oxford on 21 January and Hampstead on 1 July, with

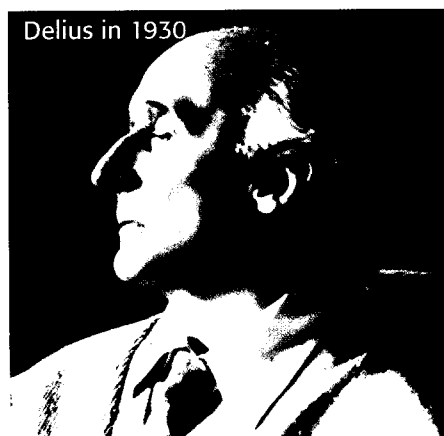
150th anniversary
1862–1934

Charles Mutter and Katherine O'Kane and with Tamsin Waley-Cohen and Gemma Rosefeld respectively.

Over the past three decades Delius's operas have often been performed in the German-speaking countries. (It took, on the other hand, until 2002 for a first Italian production of any of his operas – this time of *A Village Romeo and Juliet* – to see the light of day.) *A Village Romeo* is, however, Delius's operatic masterpiece and it has probably seen more productions overall than any other of his operas: in its latest incarnation it will open in Karlsruhe, Germany, on 28 January (in other words forestalling the birthday by just 24 hours) and with 11 further performances will continue in repertory until 28 June. Sir Charles Mackerras's death contributed to robbing us of the first production of the opera for 81 years at the Royal Opera House, a production that was, as we thought, firmly scheduled for November 2011. However, Ronald Corp and the New London Orchestra will give the work in a concert performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 25 September, and a month later the Wexford Opera Festival mounts another full production of the opera.

Karlsruhe has also engaged Roderick Williams as soloist in *Sea Drift*, on 22 and 23 April. By which time he will already have sung the work – on 24 March at the Royal Festival Hall – with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Mark Elder.

As well as at Florida's Delius Festival, which kick-starts the year, there is to be a celebration of Delius both in Paris and in the composer's home village of Grez-sur-Loing in May. Delius's latest biographer, Jérôme Rossi, masterminds a Delius Study Day at the Sorbonne on 5 May; and in Grez there are to be two concerts that will include Delius's music, the first taking place that same evening, and the second



– accompanied by an exhibition and talk
– on the following day.

The English Music Festival, centred on Dorchester-on-Thames from 1–5 June, also includes Delius, with works yet to be announced.

Next, at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford, performances of the Cello Concerto and of *Sea Drift* are scheduled on, respectively, 22 and 26 July.

The Delius Society sponsors a two-day international conference at the British Library on 22 and 23 September, with expert speakers from Britain, France, Denmark and America. The event will include a recital by the winners of the Delius Prize 2011.

Then the enterprising Ealing Festival, running from 13–28 October, will be featuring the life and works of both Delius and Charles Dickens, with Tasmin Little giving a recital to include music by Delius on 20 October as a musical centrepiece of the festival.

From 17–20 October Manchester sees its own 'Delius Celebration', based at Chetham's School of Music under the aegis of the School's Music Director Stephen Threlfall. There will be orchestral concerts in Manchester Cathedral (Chetham's Symphony Orchestra) and at the Royal Northern College of Music, and on the 18th in St George's Hall, Bradford. Also planned on the 18th is an event at the Delius Arts and Cultural Centre in Bradford. Among the festival's guest musicians are Raphael Wallfisch, cello, and John York, piano, and there will be talks and receptions. The Delius Society hosts its annual Prize Competition at Chetham's, and Classic FM may be a media partner of the festival, as well as for other Delius events throughout 2012. The Manchester Cathedral concert will include a performance of the rarely heard melodrama for speaker and orchestra, *Paa Vidderne*.

No word has yet been heard from the

BBC, but information is that Delius will be featured in Radio 3's 'Composer of the Week' series and at the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts. However, for television the award-winning film maker John Bridcut is following up his recent Britten, Elgar and Pary documentaries by making a 90-minute film on Delius that is due to be transmitted on BBC4 in May.

This foregoing list of concerts cannot be fully inclusive, as a large number of Delius's shorter works have, as expected, been programmed by many concert-giving institutions throughout the coming year. And there will be many more amateur or semi-professional performances, too numerous to mention. Where individual works are being performed this survey must inevitably concentrate largely on the first half of the year, with autumn season concert programmes for 2012 yet to be announced. The reader is advised to check updates as they appear on the Delius Society's website, which will be particularly busy up to and including the entire year. The Delius Society, with backing from the Delius Trust, the composer's musical and literary estate, has been particularly active in promoting this rich mix of Delius's works to be heard next year. It has moreover instituted a further competition – a Composition Prize worth £2,000 – details of which can again be found on the Society's website. Entries (closing date: 1 May 2012) will be considered by a panel of three judges chaired by the composer Anthony Payne.

Furthermore, often with the support of Trust or Society and sometimes with the two institutions in partnership, an unprecedented number of recordings are due to appear, heralded by an EMI box of 18 CDs that contain the cream of Delius's works – this latter in conjunction with a new EMI-Delius website, 'Delius – Apostle of Nature', launched in October 2011, created together with the Society by Jon Tolansky.



Already, orchestral recordings by two fine Delius conductors, David Lloyd-Jones and Sir Andrew Davis, have appeared in the run-up to 2012.

Particularly eagerly awaited next year are three further discs from Danacord, featuring Bo Holten conducting the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra in, respectively, Delius's *American, English and French Masterworks*, following up the artistic success of Danacord's two earlier recordings, *Danish and Norwegian Masterworks*, and with the same excellent soloists, Henriette Bonde-Hansen and Johan Reuter. As before, Bo Holten is making arrangements of a number of Delius's songs for solo voice and orchestra and they are to be included on two of these discs.

Another recording to look forward to is of Delius's orchestral music as arranged for piano four hands. The duo pianists Simon Callaghan and Hiroaki Takenouchi have been featuring such works in concert performances for some years and have now completed recording for SOMM a sequence of them on two CDs. Listen to Percy Grainger's arrangement of *North Country Sketches* and Benjamin Dale's fiery version of *Eventyr* and you will not be disappointed.

2012, then, presents us with a particularly rich mix of music representing much of the best of Delius. One hopes that the year will have ended by furthermore giving us the opportunity to hear some, if not all, of the great works for voices and orchestra.

Then there is to be a new recording for Naxos of *A Mass of Life*, coupled with the *Idyll*. David Hill conducts the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, with the Bach Choir and soloists.

The baritone Mark Stone, with his *The Complete Delius Songbook*, has done Delius lovers proud by recording for the first time all of Delius's songs on his own label. His understanding of them is profound and his own expert and detailed liner notes are those of an artist who knows what he is about. Another SOMM recording is of some of the purely choral pieces, conducted by Paul Spicer, also featuring works by John Ireland, the 50th anniversary of whose death we mark in 2012. Then, on the Delius Society's own label, Paul Guinery presents us with 'Delius and his Circle', a fascinating survey of contemporaneous English piano music. For VIP Records the cellist Philip Handy records, with Robert Markham, a number of Delius's compositions for cello and piano, together with works by Frank Bridge and Thomas Daish.

Two of the most recent books on Delius have come from perhaps surprising sources: *Frederick Delius*, a collection of twelve essays published in the Musik-Konzepte series, is the first book in German on Delius to be published in 100 years. And Jérôme Rossi's *Frederick Delius ou Une célébration de la vie*, published by Editions Papillon in 2010, is the first-ever biography of the composer to be aimed at a French-speaking readership. Two large-scale works are furthermore in preparation: a new life and music survey by Delius Society chairman Martin Lee-Browne and Paul Guinery, and a scholarly survey of the music by Jeremy Dibble. A further scholarly survey is also under way, with Roger Buckley, a past chairman of the Delius Society, examining with an expert eye Delius's 'Red Notebook' as part of a study of Delius and the Sublime. At the time of writing I also learn that Daniel Grimley, with books on Grieg and Nielsen among others behind him, aims to produce a study on the theme of Delius and Landscape. Meanwhile, writer and critic Stephen Lloyd is

working on a complete Delius discography, and the *Delius Society Journal* under its editor Paul Chennell plans special editions with contributions from various scholars during the anniversary year.

2012, then, presents us with a particularly rich mix of music representing much of the best of Delius. One hopes that the year will have ended by furthermore giving us the opportunity to hear some, if not all, of the great works for voices and orchestra, such as the luminously beautiful *Songs of Sunset* and the work that can perhaps be seen as Delius's own epitaph, *Songs of Farewell*, each a wonderful challenge for choral societies. ■

The website www.delius.org.uk provides information on both *The Delius Trust* and *The Delius Society*, along with a great deal of further information including a 'latest news' feature, listings of forthcoming concerts and events, and a 2012 page with helpful information for programme planners and performers.

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