

MY QUEST FOR HIAWATHA

Bill Thompson discusses his personal search for a performing edition and recording of Hiawatha.

My interest in Delius was first sparked by reading his page in the book *History's 100 Greatest Composers*, which I purchased as a 16-year-old on a family vacation trip in the summer of 1969. As a native of Texas, I was fascinated to read about the young Englishman who spent a year and a half living here in America on the St John's River south of Jacksonville, Florida. After hearing *Summer Evening* and *Prelude to Irmelin* on the budget Seraphim LP *The Inimitable Sir Thomas*, I was truly hooked on Delius.

I soon found Sir Thomas's thesis *Frederick Delius* in the stacks of the Houston Public Library, and devoured it eagerly. I also acquired the two Delius LPs on the Capitol label, and particularly enjoyed listening to *Florida Suite*. The Beecham book mentioned Delius's tone poem *Hiawatha*, which was written about the same time as *Florida* and was inspired by Longfellow's epic poem. It was tantalizing to think about what this other 'American' Delius work might sound like.

Christopher Palmer's 1976 book *Delius: Portrait of a Cosmopolitan* included a musical example from *Hiawatha* – a theme that Delius later re-used in *Paris*. The catalogues of Delius's works compiled by both Robert Threlfall and Rachel Lowe gave more detail about the score of *Hiawatha*, including the disappointing news that a number of pages were missing from the manuscript.

1989 saw the publication of Philip Jones's book *The American Sources of Delius's Style*. I borrowed a copy of this book from a college library and read it from cover to cover. Several pages of the book were devoted to an analysis of *Hiawatha*, and some more tantalizing musical examples were shown. I took the book over to my piano and played through the excerpts, trying to imagine what they would sound like played by the full orchestra. Using the musical examples, I even put together a computer MIDI file to simulate an orchestra playing the examples; I couldn't resist doing a bit of arranging and inserting transitional passages.

In 1998 I was able to attend the Delius Festival in Jacksonville. While visiting the Haydon Burns Library, I skimmed through their copy of Andrew Boyle's thesis *A Quest for Innocence*, which examines Delius's early

works, including *Hiawatha*. I learned that Andrew had arranged for a segment of *Hiawatha* to be recorded by an orchestra in Norway for use in a TV film, and I was able to listen to a cassette copy of this soundtrack recording, which begins with the 'dance' section. The closing section, with horn calls, shimmering strings and gentle harp arpeggios, was as beautiful as I had imagined it. But I was still frustrated by not being able to hear all of the surviving parts of *Hiawatha*.

I had started a Delius website in 1996, and so in 1998 I added a page devoted to *Hiawatha*. To illustrate the page, I chose the painting *Spellbound* by Hermon Adams because I felt that it was the perfect complement to the lines of Longfellow's poem that Delius quoted in the pages of the score.

On 26th July 2002, as I reviewed the list of the volumes of the *Delius Collected Edition* that were being published, I became concerned that *Hiawatha* might be excluded from the collection, because of the pages missing from the score. I made the following note to myself:

Hiawatha should be reconstructed or 'realised', published and recorded.
Philip Jones and Robert Threlfall should collaborate on this realisation.
Then the world premiere should take place in Jacksonville as part of a future Delius Festival.

The next day (27th July) I sent the following email message to Roger Buckley and asked him to convey it to Robert Threlfall, the Editor of the *Collected Edition*:

Dear Mr Threlfall

I appreciate your prodigious efforts over the years in cataloguing the works of Delius and also in preparing them for publication. Your accomplishment of the *Collected Edition* is a great gift to all Delians and to future students of Delius's music.

However, there is one glaring omission from the *Collected Edition*: the tone poem *Hiawatha*. It is very disappointing to know that parts of the original score are now missing. It seems unlikely that the missing portions will ever be located. *Hiawatha* has always been the Delius work highest on my wish list. It is a companion piece to *Florida*, which is one of Delius's most popular compositions and the one which gets the most airplay on our classical station here in Houston. I did get to hear a tape of the Norwegian radio broadcast of the latter sections of *Hiawatha*, and that was a dream come true for me. But the fact remains that this was only a portion of the



The late Robert Threlfall, autographing the title page of *Hiawatha*

work. The descriptions of the missing segments of the first sections of the work are tantalising.

Hiawatha deserves some special attention from the Delius Trust. *Hiawatha* should be preserved as a Supplement to the *Collected Edition*. I propose that you, possibly in collaboration with others such as Philip Jones, effect a 'realisation' of the missing portions of the score. This could be done based on the descriptions of the music by Beecham, who had access to the complete score at one time, and any other available reference material. When published, the 'reconstructed' portions could be highlighted so as to differentiate them from the extant measures of Delius's score.

It would be great if this 'realisation' of *Hiawatha* could be recorded and broadcast on the BBC, released on CD and then given its American premiere at a future Delius Festival in Jacksonville. I believe that because of the beauty of the music and its American theme, it would get a lot of airplay on classical stations in America.

I appreciate your consideration of this proposal. Again, many thanks for your work in the cause of Delius and his music.

On 4th August 2002 Robert Threlfall responded to my message, and Roger Buckley relayed it to me via email:

Many thanks for your letter which I received from Roger. FD's 'American' works have a warmth later overlaid by Nietzsche and Norway, only to re-emerge in some much later works. Obviously, *Hiawatha* belongs to this group and I quite understand your interest.

However, some of the background is not quite as straightforward as might appear from your letter, and to give the considered answer you deserve (and will in due course receive!) I need to turn back to various sources and notes made some years ago. It may be a month or so before I can put an intelligent review of the whole question together; and when I do, it may well be more suitable for *The Delius Society Journal*. Will you be a little patient, therefore, and be assured that whatever I ultimately write will come to you before it reaches the Journal Editor.

There's one thing I can say here and now: I have no intention whatever of personally 'closing the gaps' in the *Hiawatha* manuscript. It is quite a different position from any of the other scores I've edited for the *Collected Edition*, and only another composer could even consider such a project (and there's only one that I know of who has the necessary experience and understanding).

Thanks again for your letter: I'll send you a fuller report in due course.

All good wishes meanwhile.

In November 2002, Roger sent me a further response from Robert:

Since my previous letter, the Delius Trust has considered the position of this work very carefully and it was agreed that the music should be suitably processed as a further Supplementary Volume of the *Collected Edition*. I have prepared the manuscript suitably for this and put it into the hands of the publishers, who will have it processed and will submit proofs to me in due course. Of course, it is bound to take some time to reach completion, since it must join a queue for similar work, but you can be sure I shall keep up the pressure on the folk concerned until the job is done.

It is my opinion that the missing pages were removed from the bound original manuscript by Delius himself – as he did from the similar bound MS of Florida. I do not think that either Beecham, Heseltine or Fenby inspected the MS carefully enough to see this; the first and only proper description was that by Rachel Lowe in her 1974 Catalogue.

When the whole project gets a little further ahead I may well write it up at greater length in the Journal (apart from any necessary Preface to the printed score). Meanwhile, many thanks again for your interest and kind regards.

In DSJ 133, pp 7-10 (Spring 2003), Robert provided a detailed description of the *Hiawatha* score and discussed the problems that would have to be overcome in order to render it performable.

In March 2004, David and Carol Lloyd-Jones attended the Delius Festival in Jacksonville, and David conducted the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra in a special Delius Concert. I had the opportunity to talk with him during the Festival about *Hiawatha*, and provided him with photocopies of the information on *Hiawatha* in the theses by Andrew Boyle and Philip Jones. I encouraged David to consider supporting the effort to get *Hiawatha* published and recorded.

Dear David and Carol,

It was a great pleasure for me to meet you both at the Delius Festival in Jacksonville. I am so glad that you were able to participate in the Festival, and hope that your return trip home was problem-free.

Maestro, the orchestra concert was superb! The Delius works were performed with sensitivity and passion. The *Two Negro Songs* were a delight to hear – of course I immediately wanted to hear them again! To

me, these were more than just 'trifles'; they help us gain more insight into Delius's inspiration for his larger works such as *Koanga*. This was also my first time to hear *Florida* and *American Rhapsody* performed in concert. My fond memories of the concert will last a lifetime. Thank you again for your hard work in preparing and conducting the performances.

I have now received my copy of your new Naxos CD. I am waiting for a quiet evening to listen to it uninterrupted, but I am sure it will be my new favourite.

As we discussed during the Festival, I hope that you will consider more of Delius's unknown early works for future recordings. The missing pages of *Hiawatha* could be reconstructed based on the descriptions that we have from Beecham and others. This would make possible a world premiere CD recording of this important companion piece to *Florida Suite* and *American Rhapsody*. I feel that *Hiawatha* would be of great interest to listeners, particularly in America because of the source of its inspiration. Other works with potential are *Rhapsodic Variations*, the *Légendes* for piano and orchestra, the original three-movement version of the Piano Concerto – and of course the *Two Negro Songs*.

Pardon my rattling on about my 'wish list'! But I do hope that you can continue your Delius series with some of these works that are worthy of recording.

Thank you again for all of your efforts with the Delius Trust and with your recordings and performances of Delius's music.

After not hearing anything further about *Hiawatha*, in 2006 I decided to contact Anthony Payne myself to propose that he consider attempting a realization of a performing version of the work.

Dear Mr. Payne,

I propose that you take on the project of a 'realisation' of *Hiawatha*, the early tone poem by Frederick Delius. Several segments of this work are now missing. The remaining sections were broadcast on Norwegian radio some years ago, and the surviving music is very much worth hearing. I have provided a low fidelity recording of that broadcast on my Delius website:

<http://thompsonian.info/hiawatha.html>

Sir Thomas Beecham describes the entire work in his biography, and Philip Jones provides further information on the defective sections in his

book *The American Sources of Delius's Style*. I feel that a realisation of the complete work is possible, using these and other materials.

At the 2004 Delius Festival in Jacksonville, Florida, I met David Lloyd-Jones and requested that he consider recording this work, if a realisation could be achieved. If you were willing to undertake the task, I would think that the Delius Trust and Delius Society would help support the project.

Thank you for reading this, and I hope you will consider this proposal.

In January 2007 I emailed Roger Buckley to inquire about the status of *Hiawatha*.

I wondered if there was any word from Robert Threlfall as to the status of the publication of Delius's *Hiawatha* as part of the Collected Edition (as per Robert's message in 2002).

I have an idea about seeking a premiere performance of the work as a featured part of a revived Delius Festival in Jacksonville. I have made some enquiries there about the possibility of mounting a Festival in 2008, with the hope of making it a quadrennial event (the last significant Jacksonville Delius Festival was 2004). It would be great to hear some of the extant parts of the first sections of *Hiawatha* as well, if that were possible.

Robert's reply was dated 7th February 2007 and Roger forwarded it to me.

Since our previous correspondence on this subject, you will of course be aware of my note in DSJ 133 which recorded the then present position.

Subsequently, the surviving portions of the MS have been processed by Boosey & Hawkes, and proof scores of this have been received. No orchestral parts have as yet been extracted. Meanwhile, the Trust has actively sought cooperation from a suitably skilled musician with a view to producing a satisfactory performing edition, i.e. by composing suitable musical material to bridge the gaps in Delius's surviving MSS. The first person that the Trust contacted, after long and careful consideration, felt obliged to decline the assignment; subsequently a second musician has been approached in similar fashion. In my own opinion, he would be an ideal candidate, but I know he is very busy, with very many conflicting calls on his expertise. I will take an early opportunity of 'sounding' him as regards likely progress. (One problem seems to be, that the existing 'Hiawatha' material doesn't seem as attractive as any of the 'Florida'

music so evidently is.) I hope this is of some interim value to you, and will advise you if anything more definite develops.

DSJ 143 (Spring 2008) had a feature on Robert Threlfall's 90th birthday celebration, and on page 92 we read 'Hiawatha - A Postscript'. Robert told how he himself had assembled the performing version of *Hiawatha* using Delius's own materials, and that the finished product was included as Supplementary Volume 6 of the *Collected Edition* in 2008. Robert was kind enough to send me autographed copies of the published score of *Hiawatha* and the Editorial Report for the *Collected Edition*, along with a photograph of the signing.

The world premiere performance took place on 23rd May 2009 with the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by David Lloyd-Jones, and the world premiere CD recording by the same artists was released on 8th September 2009.

So 40 years after first reading about Delius's neglected and injured tone poem, I was able to listen to that beautiful and majestic orchestral music for the first time. The long quest for *Hiawatha* had come to a happy conclusion, thanks principally to the efforts of the indefatigable and irreplaceable Robert Threlfall.

'Westward, westward Hiawatha
Sailed into the fiery sunset
Sailed into the purple vapors
Sailed into the dusk of evening.
Thus departed Hiawatha,
Hiawatha the Beloved,
In the glory of the sunset,
In the purple mists of evening.'

Bill Thompson

