

**NAXOS**

Gerald  
**FINZI**

**Dies natalis**

**Farewell to Arms**

**Two Sonnets**

**James Gilchrist, Tenor**

**Bournemouth  
Symphony Orchestra**

**David Hill**



## Gerald Finzi (1901–1956)

### Dies natalis

Gerald Finzi studied privately with Ernest Farrar, Edward Bairstow and R.O. Morris. During the 1920s he came to attention with works like the miniature tone poem *A Severn Rhapsody* (1923), first performed by the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra (the forerunner of today's Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra) under Dan Godfrey, who was an indefatigable champion of British music. Finzi's reputation was enhanced with the first performances of the song-cycle *A Young Man's Exhortation* (1926-9) and the cantata *Dies natalis* (1925-39), which is rightly regarded as a minor masterpiece of its time. Two of his most popular works were first performed during World War II: his Shakespeare settings *Let us garlands bring* (1929-42) and the *Five Bagatelles* for clarinet (1920s, 1941-3). To the post-war years belong his choral ode *For St Cecilia* (1947), the *Clarinet Concerto* (1948-9), and his large-scale choral setting of Wordsworth's ode, *Intimations of Immortality* (1936-8, 1949-50). His final years were lived under the shadow of an incurable illness; nevertheless, he was able to write two further major works, the *Cello Concerto* (1951-5) and the 'Christmas scene', *In terra pax* (1951-4, 1956).

Song and vocal writing was a major facet of Finzi's art, and his settings, most frequently of his favourite poet Thomas Hardy, as well as authors of the great flowering of English prose and poetry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, resulted in music that seems inevitably to mirror the essence of the poet's thought. Finzi's energetic mind went far beyond his compositions though: he was an insatiable reader who amassed a library of over three thousand books; he was an ardent champion of neglected composers such as Ivor Gurney and Hubert Parry; and he founded an excellent amateur orchestra, the Newbury String Players. Last, but not least, in his orchard he rescued the stock of several traditional

English apples from extinction.

It was a characteristic of Finzi to complete works slowly over a number of years; *Dies natalis* had its origins in the 1920s, yet it was not completed until 1939. Conceived for high voice and strings, it was sung at its première in 1940 by Elsie Suddaby with the New London String Ensemble conducted by Maurice Miles. The work reveals essential facets of the composer and his music. There are his musical roots stemming from Elgar and Vaughan Williams; Bach too, is a further influence, reflected in the form of the work which resembles a solo cantata. The choice of the little known Anglican metaphysical divine Thomas Traherne (c1637-1674) reflects both Finzi's keen literary sensibilities, as well as his ardent championing of neglected figures if he believed their work had quality. Finally *Dies natalis* shows Finzi's quintessential preoccupation with the themes of life's brevity and life's experience tarnishing the innocent state of childhood. The text is taken from Traherne's *Three Centuries of Meditation*; what attracted Finzi to it was the poet's unsullied vision of the world as perceived by a newborn child.

The *Intrada*, for strings alone, muses on the themes of the following *Rhapsody*, where the words are set in a supple mixture of recitative and arioso at which Finzi excelled. It recalls his comment to the poet Edmund Blunden: 'I like music to grow out of the actual words and not be fitted to them'.

*The Rapture* had two inspirations: the carved angel roof of March church in the Fens and the Botticelli *Nativity* in the National Gallery: from them came Finzi's joyous dance of angelic praise. The spiritual ecstasy expressed in *Wonder* is heightened by the subtle use of harmonic clashes, and *The Salutation* is cast in the form of a Bachian chorale prelude. With the peaceful unfolding of the string melody, offsetting the voice's limpid, sighing phrases, and

Elgarian falling sevenths, the movement concludes the work in a mood of rapt awe.

Several of Finzi's compositions were planned initially to be part of larger scale works. Having composed them, Finzi consciously laid them aside until ideas for the companion movements stirred in his mind. The *Prelude for strings* is an example, first conceived in the 1920s as a movement of a chamber symphony, then an orchestral triptych on the subject of the seasons entitled *The Bud, The Blossom and The Berry*, but this too did not come to fruition. The 'Bud' movement was performed in a piano duet version in 1929, but then rewritten as this *Prelude* for strings to which Finzi intended to add a contrasting movement. Nothing came of this, however, and the work was posthumously performed in 1957 by the Newbury Strings conducted by Finzi's eldest son Christopher.

*The Fall of the Leaf* grew out of ideas that had been intended for the 'Berry' movement of the triptych. In piano duet form it was performed in the same concert in 1929 as the 'Bud' movement that became the *Prelude*. Finzi revised the work, completing it (after some five versions) again as a piano duet, probably in the early 1940s and he also left about a third of the work scored at his death. The task of completing the scoring fell to Finzi's close friend and musical executor, Howard Ferguson, who also added phrasing and dynamics. It was first performed by the Hallé Orchestra in 1957 conducted by John Barbirolli. The title is taken from a short *almayn* by Martin Pearson found in *The Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*. Subtitled *Elegy*, the music grows from a pastoral string melody, rising to two dramatic climaxes.

The *Two Sonnets*, settings of John Milton, were completed in 1928 and were first performed in 1936 by Steuart Wilson with Iris Lemare conducting. When they were published, a critic took Finzi to task for attempting to write music for poetry that defied setting. His robust retort was typical: 'I do hate the bilge and bunkum about composers trying to "add" to

a poem; that a fine poem is complete in itself, and to set it is to gild the lily ... the first and last thing is that a composer is (presumably) moved by a poem and wishes to identify himself with it and share it ... I don't think everyone realises the difference between choosing a text and being chosen by one.' Finzi, writing to his fellow composer Robin Milford, aptly described their character as 'rather gnarled and uncompromising'. Particularly effective is the conclusion of the second sonnet, which is underlaid by a Holstian marching bass, and swells to a heartfelt, dignified melodic line that captures Milton's burning desire to serve God, his 'great task-master'.

Finzi was again to benefit from Godfrey's advocacy in 1932 when he conducted his Bournemouth orchestra in the first performance of *New Year Music*, which when published was given the title *Nocturne (New Year Music)*. It was composed in 1928 and was revised during the 1940s. Finzi revealed the inspiration behind the work in a preface to the score in which he cites two literary sources - Charles Lamb's *New Year's Eve* essay in his *The Essays of Elia*, as well as Robert Bridges's poem *Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913*. Finzi quotes Lamb's view that New Year's Eve has a 'sober sadness', and continued, 'Here, then, are no merry-makings and such-like, but something of the mood which is well suggested by the words of Robert Bridges - "when the stars were shining Fared I forth alone" '. He elaborated this in a letter to Milford, remarking: 'I love New-Year's eve, though I think it's the saddest thing of the year. Anyway that's what my *New Year Music* was about!'. Don't you know Lamb's New Year's Eve essay?

In the opening section Finzi dwells on Lamb's 'sober sadness' with music that is sombre and reflective. It gives way to a central section, a stately yet solemn dance in the manner of a galliard, that suggests not only Bridge's purposeful setting out on his journey, but also the glory of the starlit sky. The dance is driven to a climatic conclusion, before the melancholy returns.

*Farewell to Arms* is a further example of a work whose gestation took place over many years as well as reflecting Finzi's enthusiasm for seventeenth-century poets. The second movement, *Aria* (composed 1926-8) sets a sonnet from George Peele's *Polyhymnia* and it was first performed in 1936. During World War II Finzi discovered Ralph Knevet's poem *The helmet now*, whose shared images with Peele's sonnet made it a perfect companion movement to the *Aria*. Finzi headed it *Introduction*, and under the title *Farewell to Arms*, the two movements were performed in 1945 by Eric Greene and the BBC Northern Orchestra conducted by Charles Groves.

Finzi's skills at writing fluid, expressive recitative are once more evident in the *Introduction*, whilst the *Aria* is again a Bachian chorale prelude. Here the steady but inevitable tramp of time, symbolized by the measured bass and the voice's sad, arching melody, becomes a poignant symbol for the brevity of life as expressed in lines such as 'O time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing'. Finzi knew all too well that 'Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen'.

**Andrew Burn**

## James Gilchrist



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James Gilchrist, a former chorister at New College, Oxford, began his working life as a doctor, turning in 1996 to a full-time career in music, bringing collaboration with leading ensembles and colleagues. His many recordings include Britten's *Albert Herring* and Vaughan Williams's *A Poisoned Kiss*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *St John Passion* (Naxos 8.557296-97), *Missa Brevis* and *Cantatas*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, sacred music by Schütz, Rameau's *Cantatas* and *St Mark Passion*, songs by Percy Grainger, and sacred music by Kuhnau. He is among the leading British tenors in eighteenth-century repertoire, to which he adds an interest in contemporary music, with a number of first performances to his credit.

## Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Founded in 1893 by Sir Dan Godfrey, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra has had among its Principal Conductors some of the finest musicians in the world, including Rudolf Schwarz, Constantin Silvestri, Sir Charles Groves and Paavo Berglund. More recently Andrew Litton raised the orchestra's standards to new levels, crowning its centenary season with a triumphant début tour of the United States in April 1994, followed by Yakov Kreizberg and débuts at the Musikverein, Vienna, the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and Carnegie Hall, New York. Marin Alsop took up the position in October 2002 and has already helped raise the profile of the BSO still further including concerts at the Philharmonie, Berlin, and in Madrid, Prague, Bruges and a return trip to Vienna. The name of the orchestra is internationally known through over three hundred recordings, including the award-winning Naxos release of Anthony Payne's sketches for Elgar's *Symphony No. 3* (8.554719) with Paul Daniel, the symphonies of Vaughan Williams with the former Chief Guest Conductor Kees Bakels and Paul Daniel, and recordings of works by Philip Glass, Leonard Bernstein, and John Adams under Marin Alsop for Naxos (8.559031), this last chosen as Editor's Choice in the November 2004 issue of *The Gramophone* magazine. The Naxos BSO/Serebrier Mussorgsky recording (8.557645) reached No. 2 in the top twenty Classical Chart, and was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2006. The William Schuman CD (Naxos 8.559083) conducted by José Serebrier received two Grammy nominations. The world première recording of the three symphonies by Ned Rorem (Naxos 8.559149), also under Serebrier, received three GRAMMY nominations. In addition to its recording and international touring commitments, the BSO is dedicated to providing orchestral music across the South and West of Britain, enhanced by a programme of educational and community projects, and makes regular appearances in major festivals and concert-halls throughout the United Kingdom.

## David Hill



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Recognised as one of the leading choral directors in the United Kingdom as well as a widely-respected orchestral conductor, David Hill currently holds the posts of Chief Conductor of The BBC Singers; Musical Director of The Bach Choir; Chief Conductor of the Southern Sinfonia and Music Director of the Leeds Philharmonic Society. David Hill's previous posts have included Director of the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, Master of the Music at Winchester Cathedral and at Westminster Cathedral. He holds an honorary doctorate from the University of Southampton for services to music. David Hill's broad-ranging and award-winning discography of over fifty recordings covers repertoire from Thomas Tallis to John Tavener. He has received critical acclaim for his discs with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra on the Naxos label: Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* (8.553885-86) with the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Waynelete Singers, Finzi's *Intimations of Mortality* (8.557863) with the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, and Herbert Howells's *Hymnus Paradisi* and *Sir Patrick Spens* (8.570352) with The Bach Choir.

Quintessentially Finzi, the tender yet radiant *Dies natalis*, a setting of texts by the 17th-century poet Thomas Traherne, depicts both the first sensations of a child as it enters the world, and life's tarnishing experience of the innocence of childhood. In *Farewell to Arms*, a further example of Finzi's enthusiasm for 17th-century poets, the steady but inevitable tramp of time, symbolized by the measured bass and the tenor's sad, arching melody, becomes a poignant symbol for the brevity of life as expressed in lines such as '*O time too swift, O swiftness never ceasing*'. Finzi knew all too well that '*Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen*'.

Gerald  
**FINZI**  
(1901–1956)

<b>Dies natalis *</b>	<b>26:16</b>	<b>Two Sonnets for</b>	<b>7:37</b>
<b>1 I. Intrada</b>	<b>5:36</b>	<b>Tenor and Orchestra *</b>	
<b>2 II. Rhapsody</b>	<b>7:32</b>	<b>8 I. When I consider</b>	<b>4:46</b>
<b>3 III. The Rapture</b>	<b>4:01</b>	<b>9 II. How soon hath Time</b>	<b>2:51</b>
<b>4 IV. Wonder</b>	<b>4:28</b>	<b>10 Nocturne (New Year Music)</b>	<b>9:39</b>
<b>5 V. The Salutation</b>	<b>4:39</b>	<b>Farewell to Arms *</b>	<b>9:01</b>
<b>6 Prelude for String</b>	<b>4:35</b>	<b>11 I. Introduction</b>	<b>3:56</b>
<b>Orchestra</b>		<b>12 II. Aria</b>	<b>5:05</b>
<b>7 The Fall of the Leaf (Elegy)</b>	<b>9:34</b>		
<b>(compl. Howard Ferguson)</b>			



**James Gilchrist, Tenor \***  
**Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra**  
(Leader: Duncan Riddell)  
**David Hill**



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Playing Time  
**66:40**



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