

Sir Malcolm Arnold

Darius Milhaud



Ralph Vaughan Williams



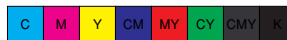
Sir Malcolm Arnold: The Return of Odysseus
(première recording)

Darius Milhaud: Suite Française
Ralph Vaughan Williams: Toward the Unknown Region

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The City of Glasgow Chorus
The Orchestra of Scottish Opera
conducted by Graham Taylor

**SIR MALCOLM ARNOLD (b.1921):**

- ① The Return of Odysseus, Op.119 * [28.20]

DARIUS MILHAUD (1892-1974):

- Suite Française, Op. 248b [15.57]

- ② Normandie [1.46]

- ③ Bretagne [3.42]

- ④ Île de France [2.07]

- ⑤ Alsace-Lorraine [5.10]

- ⑥ Provence [3.12]

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958):

- ⑦ Toward the Unknown Region * [13.17]

total CD duration [57.54]

The City of Glasgow Chorus *
The Orchestra of Scottish Opera

(leader: Anthony Moffat)

Graham Taylor, Conductor

Solo soprano in *Odysseus*: Anne Taylor

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The orchestra and chorus during the recording session.

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A point of
interpretation
discussed



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MALCOLM ARNOLD: THE RETURN OF ODYSSEUS

The Return of Odysseus is the only work Arnold wrote for chorus and orchestra. More's the pity. As the cantata shows, Arnold had an instinctive magic touch in the setting of words to music.

Written in Dublin in 1976 at a particularly turbulent period in Arnold's life, the cantata tells (in just half an hour) the story of Homer's *Odyssey*, that great epic poem which occupies no less than twenty-four books in the original Greek. It is a masterly simplification. Arnold was extremely fortunate in his librettist, a Savile Club friend, Patric Dickinson (1914-1994), a poet of much wit and imagination.

Dickinson sets the scene in Ithaca, the home of King Odysseus, twenty years after the departure of the Greek fleet to Troy and ten since the city was stormed. Still the Ithacans have no news of their King, whose kingdom is being destroyed by a bunch of louts, all eager to marry his wife,

Penelope. The Cantata begins with the Ithacans, in a hushed unison, voicing their anxieties. A boat puts in from Zakinthos. What news? The sailors tell of Odysseus' adventures with the Cyclops, the sex-starved nymph Calypso and the witch Circe. Enter the suitors, demanding confirmation Odysseus is dead. On hearing that he did indeed visit the Land of the Dead (in a Tippett-like spiritual) the suitors demand that Penelope now chooses as her new husband the first of them able to string Odysseus' bow. None can do it. But a scorned old beggar, Odysseus in disguise, strings the bow with ease and then gives the suitors a deserved come-uppance. The Ithacans rejoice, and, in an inspired ending, sing a gentle lullaby for Lady Penelope.

The Cantata, commissioned by the Schools' Music Association, received its first performance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1977, when the orchestra of the Royal College of Music was conducted by Sir David Willcocks.

Full of drama, high spirits and romance, it

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is a splendid work, well deserving a secure place in the choral repertoire.

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(The Meredith-Harris biography, *Malcolm Arnold: Rogue Genius*, was published by Thames/Elkin in 2004)



DARIUS MILHAUD: SUITE FRANÇAISE

Milhaud spent the years of the Second World War in America; as a noted Jewish artist, France was not the place to be. Whilst there he was approached by a publisher to compose something suitable for “a school band” (basically an orchestra without strings), and this short suite was the result, though he seems to have disregarded the implication of a lesser degree of difficulty!

It was first performed by a famous concert band, the Goldman Band, but Milhaud re-

scored it for full orchestra and conducted performances with the New York Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony Orchestras. He had been very ill, so sat down to conduct; “This does not inconvenience the players,” he said, “but detracts from the enjoyment of the public.”

He was a man who absorbed all kinds of musical influences like a sponge: he discovered jazz in 1920, and the next year heard Schoenberg in Vienna. But wherever he went, he loved the local folk music; as a child in Provence he heard his father's employees singing as they worked, and no doubt these are the melodies of the final movement.

Throughout the work, the tunes are short and simple, and whilst Milhaud enjoys himself by combining two or three, or giving them quirky accompaniments, this never hides their essential appeal - by turns exuberant and plaintive, and like all good tunes, catchy and singable.

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Women:

Twenty years we have been without him,
Now he is back, our land is free:
Now we can serve a proper master,
Offer love to a mighty hero,
Open our eyes to a time to be.
After twenty years he has brought tomorrow
Like a god from the sea.

Lullaby Lady Penelope,
Sleep easy and warm at last;
The time for deceiving dreams
Is past and gone.
The time for single waking
To bitter days is over.
Now every night shall restore
The love you lost,
And every day begin
With love's first opening eye.
O steadfast, O true,
Lady Penelope,
Lullaby, lullaby.

Toward the Unknown Region

Words by Walt Whitman

Darest thou now O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any
path to follow?

No map there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, not touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes,
are in that land.

I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undreamed of in that region, that
inaccessible land.

Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, time and space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds
bounding us.

Then we burst forth, we float,
In time and space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!)
them to fulfil O soul.

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**Suitors:**

There is magic in this bow!
We are lusty, we are strong,
We are muscular and young,
Yet none can draw this bow.
More wine! More wine!
Then try again,
To draw the bow and become King.

Chorus:

Scrawny old beggar by our doors,
Is it not enough that we let you in
To beg at our noble feast?
Filthy old beggar by our doors,
Do you dare touch that bow?
More wine! More wine!
Then try again,
To draw the bow and become King.
Dirty old beggar by our doors,
Shall we beat and cast you out
From our noble feast?
Lousy old beggar by our doors,
Take your hands off that bow!

He has drawn the bow!

The Slaying of the Suitors

It is Odysseus, Odysseus, Odysseus...
Where can we flee, the doors are barred...
No man from nowhere, Odysseus, Odysseus,
Save us, O gods, from pitiless fate.
None, none shall see tomorrow's sun.

Odysseus, Odysseus, Odysseus!
Oh! Oh! Alas, save us O gods
From the dark of death.
Odysseus, Odysseus, Odysseus...
Strike at him! Strike at him!
Odysseus, Odysseus, Odysseus...

Voice:

Odysseus, Odysseus...

Chorus:

ODYSSEUS!
Our lord is home,
He has drawn his bow,
He has slain the suitors,
Those evil men!
Odysseus! Odysseus!
Now shall the land
Prosper again.
Our flocks increase,
Our vines swell.
Odysseus! Odysseus!
Purge the hall
Of its evil blood,
Bear off the dead,
So justly slain;
Let all the land
Be clean again
Odysseus! Odysseus!
Our lord is home!

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**RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:
TOWARD THE UNKNOWN
REGION**

When this piece was composed, for the Leeds Festival of 1907, Vaughan Williams was still in the process of discovering his own personal style. The Sea Symphony, which he was also working on at this time, would take him much further down that road, but here there are still echoes of the lush romantic style of his immediate predecessors, and less of the leaner, sparer sound which makes his work so distinctive.

He conducted the first performance himself, and it was well received: the Times critic said it was "...easily ahead of anything the young composer has yet given us". His use of a poem by Walt Whitman as his text was also quite a break with tradition. Whilst somewhat religious, or at least visionary, in tone, it was not based on the bible, or even on Christianity in a general sense. Whilst at university Vaughan Williams had declared himself an atheist, though this moderated into what his

daughter would describe as "a cheerful agnosticism". At any event, he clearly found ideas in Whitman's work to which he was sympathetic.

The work opens very simply with a falling phrase (which was to become almost a trade mark of the composer), and a suitably hesitant, throbbing bass line gradually gives impetus to the music, as the chorus begin to explain how far removed from present reality is the destination of the soul. Soon the textures become more complex, interrupted by a moment of stillness at the words "all waits undreamed of", where a widely spread string chord supports a distant fanfare.

At last we reach journey's end with a spectacular climax, as the chorus sings "Then we burst forth" to a simplified version of the opening theme - the same four notes which open his famous hymn tune Sine Nomine (For all the Saints) and this mood is maintained to the end. Interestingly, the finale of the Sea Symphony is also a setting of Whitman

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describing the soul's journey into the unknown, but here Vaughan Williams dares to end his work not with a bang but with a whisper; a sign of growing confidence, or just the inspiration of the moment? Who can say?

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By courtesy of the Lettl Museum for Surreal Art - www.lettl.de

Photo of Sir Malcolm Arnold by Fritz Curzon.



GRAHAM TAYLOR

(Photo courtesy of The Herald and Evening Times picture archive.)



The City of Glasgow Chorus

SCOTTISH OPERA

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Suitors:

He'll never come back.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
He'll never come back. –
Rejoice, rejoice and fill the cup.
The time is up. Penelope must choose.
One shall be lucky and her lord,
One shall be lucky and rule this isle.
No more delay, this is the day of fate,
Tomorrow shall see us, all but one,
Sailing away into the sun,
None with a life to lose.
Odysseus he is dead and gone,
Penelope must choose her mate.
Who shall it be?
None is less lordly than his friends,
But here today the waiting ends,
Odysseus he is dead and gone;
Penelope must choose.
Tomorrow shall see us, all but one,
Sailing away into the sun.
O who shall wed and share her bed
So long enchanted by the dead?
But we will cry "Rejoice! Rejoice!"
Penelope must choose.

Chorus:

Whoever draws the bow of Odysseus
With him shall she go.
What could be easier?
Bring in the bow!

Rejoice, rejoice, and fill the cup!
Penelope has made her choice
But what if it be all of us?
Or some of us, or one of us?
The bow and the bowstring know.

Scrawny old beggar by our doors,
No man from nowhere,
Graciously we will let you sup
At this hour rejoice with us!
Fill his cup and drink a toast.
Odysseus down among the ghosts.
Dirty old beggar by our doors,
Don't hesitate! Drink up!
To Odysseus down among the ghosts!
He'll never come back!
He'll never come back!
Rejoice, rejoice and fill the cup!
Now for the trial and the choice.
Whoever shall draw the bow
He shall be King and take
Penelope for wife.
Rejoice, rejoice and fill the cup!
Filthy old beggar within our doors.
Now for the trial and the choice!
Tomorrow shall see us, all but one,
Sailing away into the sun
To seek new life.
No man from nowhere answer us,
Who shall be King?

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**Sailors:**

Why do you want to know?

Suitors:

We want to know that he is dead.

Women:

Oh, oh, did you hear, did you hear?
The arrogant beasts, the arrogant beasts!

Suitors:

We want to know that he's DEAD!

Sailors:

Odysseus he went down to Hell.
Why did he go down to Hell?
- To ask how to get home.
The ghosts they came by twos and threes
And asked him why he'd got to Hell,
If he wanted to go home.

Oh drink the blood and tell me true,
I'm asking my old friends in Hell
How I get home.
"You're home and dry," they answered him,
"You're here among your friends in Hell.
This is your home, your home."

Suitors:

He'll never come back.
He'll never come back.

He'll never come back.
Rejoice! Rejoice!

Women:

Did you hear them? O their wickedness!
He must come back today!

Women:

For twenty years our lady Penelope
Steadfast and true to her lord,
Has foiled these hot importunate men.
"When I have done my weaving,
Then I will choose one of you."
So she spoke, and every day
She wove and wove for all to see,
And every night in secrecy
Unpicked her work and every day
Began where she began before.
She gulled them till a traitor spied
Her loving fingers at their work.
These hateful men demand a choice,
That can no longer be denied.
"Whoever draws my husband's bow
Him must I take into the house,
And feed and bed, but first he must
Draw full the great bow of Odysseus!"
So in her misery she cried.
O weep for our lady Penelope!
Weep for her bitter plight!
Steadfast and true to her lord, O may
Some god, as is just and right,
Bring utter doom upon their lust.

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The Return of Odysseus

Words by Patric Dickinson

Chorus:

It is twenty years since he went away,
Twenty years since he sailed for Troy.
We were hardly born;
We have never seen him, Odysseus! Odysseus!
King of our island.
His mighty prowess, his wisdom, his cunning
Is hearsay history;
We were hardly born.

Women:

Lady Penelope waits and weeps
In her cold bed.
How long can she bear it
Before her heart is broken
And she feels him dead?

Our land is leaderless
Our mistress beset
By a horde of alien suitors
Craving her hand in marriage.
How long can she wait?

You are too young to act.

We are too old to wait.

It cannot go on.

His son has gone to seek him;

May it not be too late.

Chorus:

Twenty years since he went away,
Ten years since the fall of Troy.
We heard as children,
We never have seen you, Odysseus! Odysseus!
Why do you delay? Is it God's hatred?
Our land is in peril;
Will you never come?

Sailors (in distance):

Land at last! Land at last!
The air smells of good earth,
It is good to be home.

Women:

Sailors, where have you been?

Sailors:

To far away Zakynthos –
Why do you want to know?

Women:

Have you had news of Odysseus?

Sailors:

Why do you want to know?

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**Women:**

We want to know if he's alive.

Sailors:

O out from Troy the hero sailed,
 Bravest of Greeks they tell,
 Till he and his crew came to the land
 Where the giant Cyclops dwells.
 He seized Odysseus and his crew,
 And began to eat them alive,
 But Odysseus knew a thing or two
 And said "Lads, we'll survive."
 The Cyclops crunched another four,
 But Odysseus poked out his one red eye
 And though he guarded the cavern door
 The crafty cap'n and crew got by.
 Odysseus mocked him from the bay
 And he hurled a mighty rock
 That washed the boat back to the beach
 And gave 'em all a shock.
 "Row twice as hard" the hero cried,
 The crew they rowed full hard,
 "And stow your gab" they snarled at him,
 "Or we'll chuck you overboard!"

Women:

Oh, oh, oh, then?

Sailors:

He'll never come back,
 He'll never come back.

Women:

It cannot be true.

Sailors:

Calypso she was a lovely lady,
 She lived on a lonely isle.
 Odysseus staggered out of the water
 Half-drowned, and goggled at the goddess's
 daughter,
 And she said, "You stay for a while."
 Odysseus spent his daytime weeping
 Out by the empty sea.
 He wept for his wife, till the sun was setting
 And Calypso called, "It's time to be getting
 In bed with immortal me."

Women:

It cannot be true!
 Alas for Penelope!

Sailors:

He'll never come back.
 He'll never come back.

Women:

He must, he will,
 He must be alive.

Sailors:

Why do you want to know?

Women:

We want to know if he's alive.

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Sailors:

Circe was a great enchantress,
 A witch with a powerful eye.
 She turned Odysseus's mates into pigs
 And shut them in a sty.
 But Hermes came to the help of Odysseus,
 And gave him a powerful charm,
 So he gave Circe a hard glad eye
 And popped her under his thumb.
 So his mates were turned back into fornicating
 heroes
 And the palace was set to rights.
 There was feasting and drinking, and don't ask
 where
 Odysseus spent his nights.

Women:

Oh, oh, oh, it cannot be true!
 Odysseus is brave,
 Odysseus is steadfast,
 Odysseus is noble.

Sailors:

He'll never come back.
 He'll never come back.

Women:

Alas, alas, he will, he must,
 He must come back to us.
 Never listen to sailors,
 Sailors always lie.
 We will wait and hope.

Sailors:

He'll never come back!

Women:

He is good and true!
 We will wait and hope!

Sailors:

He'll never come back.
 Why should he come back?
 He's got what he wants,
 Calypso and Circe,
 We know their sort.

Women:

He is not like that,
 He is good and true,
 This is his home.
 He is our king,
 We are his people,
 We will wait and hope...

Suitors:

Ahoy there, sailors, where have you been?

Sailors:

What's that to you? And who are you?

Suitors:

We are the suitors of Queen Penelope.
 We want news of her long-lost husband.
 Where is Odysseus?

[9]