

Stanfordian Thoughts
A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford
by Christopher Howell

3. The Second Violin Concerto: Did the full score ever exist?

Hard on the heels of the “semi-concertos”, *Ballata and Ballabile* op.160 and Irish Concertino op.161, Stanford returned to the world of the full-scale concerto. Violin Concerto no.2 in G minor op.162 was completed in short score on 30 August 1918. For many years it was supposed that the full orchestral score had been lost. However, Jeremy Dibble advanced the plausible theory that the short score was the only one completed, this concerto being the first of several works – the others being the Piano Concerto no. 3 op.171, the Mass “Via Vitrix” op.173 and a set of Variations op.180 for violin and orchestra – which exist only in this form. The presumption is that Stanford would have sent copies of the short score to soloists who might be interested, and trusted to his super-efficient technique to produce a full score at short notice if a performance was actually promised. The only one of these works to be published in any form was the Mass “Via Vitrix”, which was issued in vocal score by Boosey. The title page tells us that “The full score and band parts may be obtained from the publishers”, but this may have been merely evidence of intention. Only the Gloria has ever been performed, in Cambridge under Stanford’s direction on 15 June 1920. Press reports do not clearly show whether it was accompanied by orchestra or just organ, though the London Symphony came up for the occasion¹.

Returning to the Second Violin Concerto, it has been supposed that it was intended for Margaret Harrison, who performed Stanford’s First Violin Concerto at the RAM on 12 July 1918. Be that as it may, so far as is known, it was finally performed, in an orchestral realization by Jeremy Dibble, on 2 March 2012 in Durham Cathedral, with Rupert Marshall-Luck as soloist. A recording by the same soloist, with the BBC Concert orchestra conducted by Owain Arwel Hughes, was set down on 7-9 January 2014 and issued on EMR CD023. Both the premiere and the recording aroused considerable interest, not least from MWI reviewers [John Quinn](#) and [Michael Cookson](#).

The short score is held by the Pierpont Morgan Library of New York, which has made available a scanned version at their website. Anybody tempted to use this for performance purposes, whether with piano or bypassing Jeremy Dibble with an orchestration of their own, is reminded that copyright in works neither published nor performed during a composer’s lifetime runs, in Europe, for 70 years from publication or first performance. So until 2 March 2082 you will need permission from the copyright holders of Stanford’s estate, the Royal Schools of Church Music, to use the Pierpont Morgan score for anything but private study. I also suggest that anyone intending to bypass Jeremy Dibble with a version of their own would be foolhardy, since Dibble’s version is so totally convincing, and so totally consistent with the works Stanford did orchestrate, that I cannot suppose that an original full score, were one to turn up after all, would be very different. I can only hope that publication of Dibble’s score will not be long delayed.

Could an original full score turn up? Probably not, but I must point to one feature of the Pierpont Morgan MS that I have not seen discussed. Towards the end of the first movement, after the first line of p.7, Stanford puts an asterisk with the comment “I have left out two pages and inserted them on a separate sheet”. The two pages – actually one-and-a-bit – are duly included with the score. Now it is

¹Smith, Peter John (2008) The choral music of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924 and the press c.1875-1925. Masters thesis, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2542/>, p.246

quite easy, when you are copying music out, to turn over two pages of the score you are copying and, if the music joins up well enough, to proceed for quite a way before you realize your mistake. If you have gone ahead some considerable distance, it might seem preferable to provide an insert rather than throw away a whole page in order to write the missing music where it belongs. But you would not do this when you are actually composing the music. A composer could, of course, decide to insert an additional episode in the music, duly writing it on an insert so as not to have to write out a whole new score. But Stanford did not write "I have added a new episode here", or words to that effect, he wrote "I have left out two pages". Something similar, on a smaller scale, happens at the bottom of page 12. Having copied out the violin part correctly, he jumps two bars in the piano accompaniment, then, finding solo part and accompaniment out of phase, crosses out two bars of the piano part and writes the correct version underneath. Once again, somebody copying automatically could do this. Somebody composing would be hearing the music as he writes it. He could not write the violin and piano parts out of phase for a couple of bars before noticing it. In other words, this Pierpont Morgan MS is not a first copy, it is a copy, in Stanford's hand, of another MS, now lost. As to whether he was transcribing from a full score that really did exist once, or whether he was making a second copy of the short score, is a matter for speculation. Idle speculation unless other material comes to light, but it seems to me clear beyond doubt that the Pierpont Morgan score was not Stanford's first original copy of the piece. I would only add that it was Stanford's invariable habit to compose straight into full score, providing piano scores and the like afterwards, as he had done shortly before this with *Ballata and Ballabile* and the Irish Concertino. So would he have suddenly changed a lifelong habit, or is it not more likely that a full score existed once?

The putative Margaret Harrison connection is worth looking at. About six weeks elapsed between her RAM performance of the First Concerto on 12 July 1918 and the completion of the short score of the Second Concerto on 30 August. Could even the quick-working Stanford have written a whole concerto, albeit in short score, in so little time? Jeremy Dibble tells us that he wrote the First Concerto in October and November 1899² (Dibble, p.318), and this in full score, so the answer would seem to be that he could. But, compulsively productive as he was, what had he been doing between the completion of his op.161, the Irish Concertino, on 22 January 1918, and 12 July when, perhaps, Margaret Harrison's playing of his First Violin Concerto inspired him to write another one?

Well, both op.163, the first series of 24 Preludes for piano, and op.164, the 8-voice Magnificat, are dated September 1918. So that means his opus numbers had got slightly out of order – it would not be the first time. It also means that, even if the bulk of the Preludes, and maybe the Magnificat too, had been written earlier in the year, September 1918 was an awfully busy month, even by his standards. It could also mean that he spent late winter and spring working on a new violin concerto, in full score according to his usual custom, but failed to have it ready for the RAM concert on 12 July, hence he had Margaret Harrison play the First Concerto. Just to continue with the chronology, op.165, the two Sonatas for violin and piano accompaniment, is missing, so we do not know where it slots in. Op.166, the String Quartet no. 7, was completed in time for a performance on 27 February 1919.

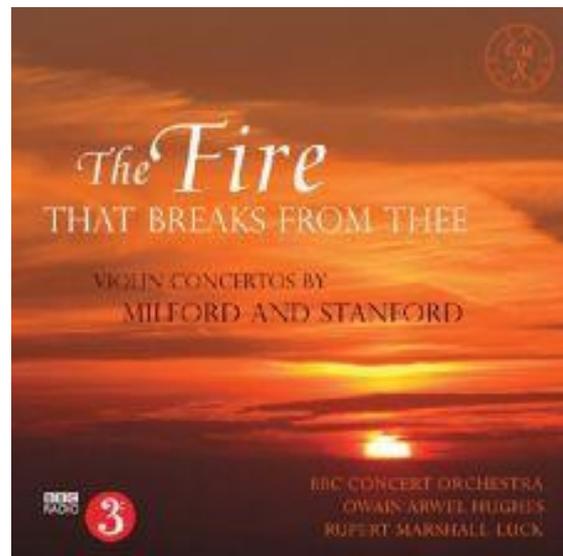
How did a piano score of the Second Concerto end up in New York? More speculation, but Stanford must have recalled, as Margaret Harrison played the First Concerto, Kreisler's performance of this work in 1904. No doubt he was miffed by Kreisler's clear preference, since 1910, for the concerto by his rival Elgar. Why not send Kreisler a copy of his new concerto?

² Jeremy Dibble: *Charles Villiers Stanford, Man and Musician*, Oxford University Press 2002, p.318.

As to the music itself, Stanford was in one sense returning to the fold after a couple of not-quite-concertos. However, his classical control over his material does not preclude a feeling of great spontaneity. After the opening challenge, the first movement is a generally lyrical outpouring. Though this is recognizably Stanfordian in tone, it is in the other two movements that the Irish accent becomes unmistakable. The second is an intimate, songful rhapsody, the finale is a striding war song on the lines of the pieces of that name in his violin and piano sets opp.54 and 154. Marshall-Luck plays with pure tone and excellent style, while the orchestra and Arwel Hughes provide an atmospheric – and vital where necessary – backdrop.

After such a long introduction, I have written little about the music. My colleagues have already done this and it is not my intention to “revise and correct” their work. I would like to look at two issues raised.

John Quinn muses, at the end, whether a masterpiece has been discovered, and concludes it has not. Probably he is right, but what exactly is a masterpiece? Among romantic concertos, there is surely general agreement that the Mendelssohn and Brahms are masterpieces. Probably the Tchaikovsky, too, though the fact that we usually hear it in a cut version implies that it may be a flawed masterpiece. When I was a teenager, we were warned to steer clear of the Dvořák. “A singularly uninspired work”, I remember reading somewhere. That is not how it sounded in the Josef Suk/Karel Ančerl recording but, even without such inspired advocacy, it has quietly entered the repertoire and most violinists from the last couple of generations play it. We were also told that the Sibelius was not fully worthy of him, but violinists played it anyway and not many critics carp today. We have always been told that Max Bruch 1 is no masterpiece, but there seems no way to get rid of it, even if we wanted to. So where does this leave Stanford? It would be a strange violinist who preferred either of the Stanford concertos to the Brahms, the Tchaikovsky or even the Dvořák. It would perhaps not be such a strange violinist who found them at least as rewarding as Max Bruch *other* than no.1, and the “other” Bruch concertos have chalked up a discrete discography over the years.



Michael Cookson noted that Marshall-Luck “plays with commitment and feeling on maybe not the sweetest sounding instrument”. I had the impression that, beautifully as he plays, I missed the vibrant humanity with which Josef Suk brought the Dvořák to life, or the vocal quality with which Mischa Elman made Bruch 2 sound like a masterpiece – that word again. If you have doubts about performances of Dvořák or Bruch, you can always listen to other versions. And there is the rub. One recording, even a very good one, of what is clearly a fine work, is not enough. In view of the totally different interpretations given of the *Ballata and Ballabile* by cellists Raphael Wallfisch and Gemma Rosefield, who knows what range of interpretation the Stanford Second Violin Concerto might bear?

Christopher Howell © 2018