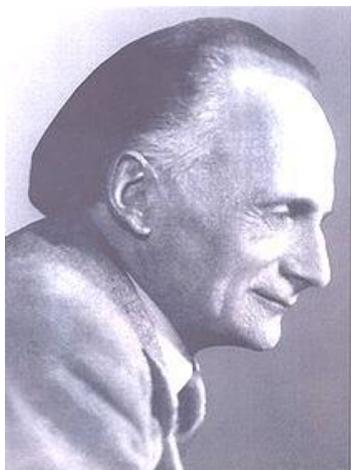


The Life and Music of Rutland Boughton

by Alan Senior

'How beautiful they are, the lordly ones who dwell in the hollow hills' – Fiona Macleod



Rutland Boughton (1878–1960) (image courtesy of Boughton Music Trust) was born at Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, England but much of his life would be centred on Glastonbury in Somerset. His conservative, puritanical father, who was a grocer, had very little money to spend on his son's musical education, though the boy had shown remarkable musical gifts and was encouraged by his mother. 1892 found him apprenticed to Cecil Barth's London concert agency, displaying a determination and confidence which often comes to those who are largely self-taught in music and composition. This agency work taught him the value of self-advertisement and he wrote many works at this time – mostly 'potboilers' like the ones written by Cyril Scott and John Foulds in *their* early careers. Boughton's fortitude managed to attract both sympathy and enough interest for Charles Villiers Stanford, and Lady Battersea of the Rothschild family (who had gained a reputation

as a social activist), to fund him for a brief spell at the Royal College of Music in 1900, where he studied under Stanford and Walford Davies but the academic restraint didn't suit him and he left after a year when funds ran out, though he acknowledged the benefit gained from the two composers.

Boughton never followed his family's religious affiliations, stating that religion was generally 'too narrow for a God', which might have been echoed by others at the time. Amongst the notes for an uncompleted autobiography, he wrote: *'One day, when looking through the books in a penny tray outside a second-hand bookshop, and casually opening one by Annie Besant, I read 'Jesus Christ was the illegitimate son of a girl called Mary.' That was a bit of a stunner. My own church-going habits had been entirely broken and I felt guilty about them; but if there was any truth in this blasphemy my neglect would become a virtue.'*¹ Michael Hurd also comments on Boughton's view that *'art has the power to purify men's souls and bring about the recognition of some ultimate truth'* (p. 21). He would have found such ideas in the works of the Celtic Revivalists and the Russian Symbolists, expressed quite forcefully a little later in books and articles by Cyril Scott. Boughton was dogged by extreme poverty, only gradually making his way as a composer, and having to work as copyist, arranger, accompanist and journalist, also playing in the orchestra at the Haymarket Theatre. A chance meeting with Granville Bantock led to a teaching post at the Midland Institute of Music in Birmingham in 1905, which he held until 1911. Here, he progressed quickly as a composer of choral works, an inspired teacher of singing and as conductor of the Birmingham Choral Society, when many of his choral compositions were performed with praise from the critics, leading to some of his works being published.

Boughton also gained a reputation as a controversial thinker on religion and socialism, influenced (like Holst) by William Morris, and he also developed a love of Wagner's music-dramas. At this time, he produced a work called *Midnight*, with words taken from Edward Carpenter's 'Towards Democracy', performed at the Birmingham Triennial Festival, but the attitude of the publishers displayed the narrow-mindedness of the times. Boughton said: *"The poet's series of pictures of various people sleeping in their beds includes a lovely and reverent allusion to the young man as he lies beside his new-made bride, worshipping sleepless on her bosom. This passage much disturbed my good publishers, who feared it would spoil any chance of success the work might have; so after a good deal of bother I consented, with Edward Carpenter's permission, to drop out the last five words. Nevertheless, I shall be most happy to hear of any choral society willing to sing them. The music stands waiting for them."*

² It still awaits a modern performance, but Carpenter's poems, which preached universal love and brotherhood, were a lasting influence, together with his work as a pioneering socialist.³

Two people played a large role in the development of what Boughton called 'Choral Dramas' – the poet and journalist Reginald R. Buckley (1882-c.1920), and the artist and designer Christina Anne Stansfield Walshe (1888-1959). He had been seriously thinking of establishing an 'English Bayreuth' to perform a projected cycle of music-dramas based on the Arthurian legends. Boughton intended these music-dramas to be 'dramas of the spirit' with a sense of religious mystery and an expression of the *oversoul* of the English people, and when he read a series of poetic dramas on the legends by Buckley, he discerned their suitability for choral works. He'd also thought about establishing a commune of artists and musicians away from London, where there had been little opportunity for operatic composers, but that idea gained little support. However, the music-dramas appealed to people like Thomas Beecham, Holst, and George Bernard Shaw who at first thought that Boughton would only produce second-hand Wagnerian works but changed his mind later, saying: "*Now that Elgar has gone you have the only original English style... I find that I have acquired a strong taste for it*" (Hurd, p. 40).

Glastonbury was Boughton's chosen centre of operations, a town with no orchestra and no theatre, only assembly rooms, so all scores had to be reduced for piano accompaniment, with the choir formed from personal friends and enthusiastic and supportive amateur singers. It seemed like a recipe for disaster, especially when war was declared on August 4, 1914, the day before the first meeting of the Glastonbury Festival Committee, but Boughton's driving enthusiasm, forceful personality, and the ability to overcome all barriers ensured that performances *would* take place. The half-Irish and keen Celtic Revivalist Christina Walshe, who had become Boughton's lover, would be responsible for stage decorations and costumes, and there were promises of support and lectures by Edward Carpenter, the composer Ethel Smyth, the dancer Margaret Morris (founder of the Celtic Ballet) and Beecham with his orchestra. However, when it was discovered that Boughton and Christina were living together but not married, local opinion changed drastically and support dwindled. One is reminded of how Scriabin found himself in a similar position in New York when he and Tatyana Schloezer were ejected from both their hotel and the USA due to their 'living in sin'. A similar thing also happened to John Foulds and Maud MacCarthy whilst working for the Theosophical Society in London.

So why Glastonbury as an operatic centre? There were many reasons, not least of which was his fascination with Celtic mythology, particularly the Arthurian legends and its links with the area, soon to be woven into the cycle of music-dramas, with librettos supplied by Buckley. The name Glastonbury may be derived from the Celtic *Iniswitrin*, 'Isle of Glass' or 'Crystal Isle', a veritable place of enchantment. The Welsh had called it *Ynys Avallan*, meaning 'The Isle of Apples', and in Celtic mythology the apple is the fruit of the Otherworld. Legend has it that the fatally wounded King Arthur was carried off to this Otherworld, or Avalon, there to await a return in the time of his nation's greatest need. The antiquarian J.A. Goodchild, an expert on British Manuscripts but who was also involved in occult work, had placed a glass vessel in the waters of Bride's Well, a spring outside Glastonbury, and the Celtic Revivalist William Sharp (1855-1905, aka Fiona Macleod – see left) also took part in this ritual, together with the group that later became known as 'the Avalonians', the title of a book by Patrick Benham (Gothic Image Publications 1993). Sharp is thought to have been a member of both the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and W.B. Yeats's secret Celtic Mystical Order (always a mystic Yeats found himself perceptibly drawn to the Avalonian tradition and Goodchild).



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Glastonbury has many tales of magic, mystery and imagination attached to it, a sacred place where many hope to glimpse or touch the Eternal. Some think it was once a pagan matriarchal centre – a 'goddess' location with a women's druidical 'college' functioning there before Christianity – and this idea may have attracted Sharp (Fiona), whose dual personality was established to express the intuitive, feminine side of his nature, leading to tremendous complications. He sometimes described Fiona as an ancestral seeress and the complete split in his personality led him to actually correspond with 'her'

and receive letters in return, making sure that she never appeared in person, with Sharp acting as her agent. We should remember that the repression of those times bears no resemblance to today's era of transgender and same-sex marriages, etc; thus many thought William Sharp and Fiona Macleod to be separate persons and when the truth came out it caused a scandal.

Boughton was familiar with Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's recently-published Hebridean folk-songs, and had already set many of Fiona Macleod's poems to music, including four of the *Six Spiritual Songs* (1910) and *Five Celtic Songs* (also 1910). He would use four others in the *Six Celtic Choruses* of 1914, so we can see that he was steeped in Celticism and the Celtic Revival, later using his own, Celtic-inspired libretto for *The Ever Young* in 1928. He also set Christina Walshe's *Songs of Womanhood* (1911), which she dedicated to 'awakening womanhood in Britain' at the time of the suffragettes, but now he set to work, with Christina's encouragement, to adapt Fiona Macleod's play, 'The Immortal Hour', to music... in Michael Hurd's words, '*to supply that element of profound mysticism that pure words cannot express... the first British opera libretto of genuine literary merit... far removed in spirit and deed from the melodramatic claptrap that had all too often passed for 'opera' among British composers of earlier generations*' (p. 54). He'd seen immediately that '*William Sharp had unwittingly written a libretto – a text that cries out for music and seems incomplete without it*' (p. 269). As Sharp had died in 1905 the drama had to be re-shaped, and Boughton dispensed with Wagnerism in favour of simple lyricism. However, the real meaning of the story seems to have been missed by audiences, '*that behind the simple tale of a love that is found, enjoyed, and finally lost forever, there is the subtle parable of the transience of beauty – the bitter knowledge that perfection cannot last*' (p. 148).

Did the composer view Glastonbury as a spiritual centre, which many New Age travellers regard these days as a place where an initiation journey can be undertaken to overcome the confines of materialism and modern living? The theosophist Anna Kingsford was also attracted to the Avalonians. She left the Theosophical Society to delve deeply into the spiritual traditions of the British Isles, forming the Hermetic Society after perceiving that both the Golden Dawn movement and C.W. Leadbeater's ritualistic Liberal Catholic Church had emerged as a result of such studies. However, in Boughton's case the initial concern was not so much with 'soul growth' but an attempt to overcome the restrictions of city life – the emotional, psychological and financial crises he had suffered in London. He was familiar with the Western Mystery tradition, gained from earlier readings and discussions with W. Tudor Pole (a Spiritualist obsessed with the quest for the Holy Grail), and Dion Fortune (the pen-name of Violet Mary Firth, later Evans) who had trained in the temples of the Golden Dawn movement before founding the Fraternity of the Inner Light at Glastonbury. She wrote about the Goddess and Women's Mysteries, all based on ideas originally gained from studying the occult works of the theosophist H.P. Blavatsky. Later, in 1934, after forming a pilgrim centre, 'The Chalice Orchard Club', she published 'Glastonbury, Avalon of the Heart'. Other Avalonians of Boughton's acquaintance included the sculptress Katherine Maltwood, who developed the idea that the Glastonbury landscape formed a giant zodiac with the Tor at its centre,⁴ and he also knew Frederick Bligh Bond, often called 'Architect of the New Age', an English architect, illustrator, archaeologist, psychical researcher, and great-grand-nephew of Captain Bligh of 'Mutiny on the Bounty' fame. He became director of excavations at Glastonbury Abbey for the Church of England from 1904 to 1921, an unpaid seasonal job, and he maintained that the dimensions of the Abbey were based on *gematria*.⁵

This 'community of seekers' hoped to restore a balance with all life on the planet and the endeavour seems to be intensifying now, with the present period seen as a time of spiritual testing. Many people continue to make the pilgrimage to this sacred site, some residing there, others moving on to other 'powerhouses of the spirit' such as Tintagel and St. Michael's Mount in the South of England, followed by Iona, Callanish and Findhorn in Scotland.



Glastonbury Abbey (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Nothing could stem Boughton's determination and sheer imaginative ability, and after managing to regain the support of local residents and people like Elgar, Bantock and the Clark shoe manufacturing family, there was a public appeal for funds to launch a festival theatre. On August 26, 1914 came the first of three Glastonbury performances of *The Immortal Hour*, which Arnold Bax later declared to be '*the best opera written by an Englishman*' and which proved to be an immediate success. It would be produced at the Regent Theatre, London in October 1922, resulting in an unbroken record for the longest run of any English Romantic opera... 216 consecutive performances with a further 160 from November 1923. Ten years later the opera had been heard over five hundred times in London, the audience at all times being completely spellbound by the music, which is hauntingly beautiful, often with what one might call an 'otherworldly' quality, particularly in the orchestra's string and woodwind sections. All this is a far cry from today when we usually hear only one small excerpt featured on radio programmes such as 'Your Hundred Best Tunes'.

The work is definitely strange to 21st-century sensibilities, often disturbing yet compelling, re-telling the ancient Celtic legend of a faery female and her human lover – somewhat bardic in feeling but entirely original in Sharp's interpretation. The poet had also created a new character, Dalua, 'the agent of all dark and unknown powers, whose touch brings madness and death to mortals.' He dominates the action throughout, whilst the faerie folk are, like the ones supposedly encountered by the Scottish painter John Duncan on Iona, similar in many ways to humans, both fierce and proud: '*They laugh and are glad and are terrible.*' The work can be enjoyed without knowing the Irish myth on which it is based, though the story of Orpheus and Eurydice may sometimes come to mind. It was also partly inspired by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's 'Songs of the Hebrides' (Volume I, 1907), which Boughton had studied, but the intensity and mysticism of both Sharp's words and the music demand a special understanding on the part of the singers, and if Holst knew the text he would have seen parallels with the Vedas... with Dalua (the Lord of Shadow) resembling Varūna, whilst Etain, the faerie-land princess, would have reminded him of Ushās, the Dawn. Michael Hurd has pointed out how Sharp's story is firmly rooted in archetypes represented by these faerie-world characters, so the story touches the deepest levels of the psyche. In the sleeve notes to the 1983 recording, Hurd says that Boughton's genius lay in '*recognising the play's possibilities and moulding them to his own ends*', by blending '*three potentially conflicting musical ingredients: the purely choral utterance, derived from oratorio and... part of the British musical heritage, the system of representative themes, derived from Wagner though carried out in a distinctly unWagnerian way: and the self-contained song, derived from the traditional British tendency towards ballad-opera methods... creating an appropriate sound-world that has no real parallel in the music of his contemporaries.*' In Patrick Benham's words, '*this work seemed to be a success from the outset, and has, in fact, done more than anything so far to carry the Glastonbury ideas abroad*' (p. 176). Indeed, *The Immortal Hour* was successfully performed not only in London but in Bristol, Bath, Bournemouth and Birmingham; Bernard Shaw attended some of the Glastonbury performances at the Assembly Rooms and commented favourably.

The work was certainly Boughton's greatest musical success at the time, and he was able to return to London and be recognized as a great composer, with Edward Elgar remarking in 1920: "*Mr. Boughton's music drama 'The Immortal Hour' is a work of genius.*" Ernest Newman called it '*one of the loveliest and most original English works of our time*' and later, in 1949, Vaughan Williams stated: '*In any other country such a work would have been in the repertoire... years ago.*' However, it still stands outside the repertory of any established British opera companies and Hurd points out that the work's evocative and memorable elements of mystery and wonder worked against it, as did its popularity, with the critics failing to see any serious content, and it demands a specially sensitive amount of imagination and sympathy to avoid mishandling it completely. As a result, it largely languished in oblivion, with Boughton's other works, until that Hyperion recording conducted by Alan G. Melville.

The composer continued to generate other works, including *The Birth of Arthur* and *The Round Table*, both produced successfully and afterwards taken to the Old Vic. His *Alkestis*, a translation from Euripides, was produced in 1922 and its success resulted in the British National Opera Company staging it at Covent Garden, with frequent performances in 1924. *The Queen of Cornwall*, adapted from Thomas Hardy's version of the Tristan and Isolde legend, was also produced that year... dark and brooding, full of tension and set on the storm-ravaged coast around Tintagel. One reviewer noted, writing about a recent recording, that it wasn't a pale imitation of Wagner's *Tristan* but a strong, sweeping and effective music-drama with vivid characterizations. Efforts to provide a proper Glastonbury theatre and to set up a limited company failed, due, Boughton admitted, to his inability as a business man. A more recent attempt in 1996 to promote a Glastonbury Arts Festival along the lines envisaged by Boughton also faded very quickly.

The composer's other immediate success, *Bethlehem* of 1915, was a choral drama based on the Coventry Nativity Play. Boughton called it a folk-opera, intended for local amateur players, and it contains carols, some written by himself. However, it created a scandal in 1926 when Boughton presented it in London in modern dress – a gesture of solidarity with the miners' lock-out just before the General Strike. Thus, Christ was born in a miner's cottage and Herod was depicted as a cigar-smoking capitalist in top hat, surrounded by police and soldiers, which echoed Boughton's Communist sympathies (he also joined the Party in 1926). This infuriated the Tory press and the subsequent lack of both audiences and funds ended the Glastonbury Festivals. Obscurity lay on the horizon and in 1927 Boughton, with help, was able to purchase a nine-acre smallholding near the village of Kilcot in Gloucestershire, to raise chickens and goats... an essential source of income, especially during the 1940-45 war. Like George Lloyd, another English composer who had faded into insignificance, he continued to compose, wrote articles and subsidised these activities with the farm income (in Lloyd's case, growing mushrooms and carnations at his market garden in Dorset).

Boughton's promotional work was the model for other art and music festivals in Bath, Aldeburgh and Glyndeboune. He didn't live to see the emergence of the new Glastonbury Festival which began in a small way in 1970 and expanded to become internationally famous, but he would not have approved of the rowdy and often non-musical elements in the numerous pop bands, far removed from the folk-art he envisaged.⁶ Before he left Glastonbury, he was able to complete the *Second Symphony*, named after the young Celtic heroine Deirdre, which he'd originally planned as a three-act ballet after a meeting with Ninette de Valois, who found the music unsuitable for her needs. At least the symphony received one broadcast performance by a reduced BBC Orchestra in 1932, conducted by the composer, and the programme also included his overture to *The Queen of Cornwall* (not performed in the recent recording) and three *Tristram Songs* to words by Thomas Hardy. There were other performances before the symphony's total neglect until Edward Downes, who as a young conductor had met Boughton, rescued the unpublished score for a 1985 performance with the BBC Philharmonic, after having done the same thing for the *Third Symphony* two years earlier. (Downes was also responsible for resurrecting George Lloyd's symphonies in the 1980s, which have now all been recorded).

Boughton certainly didn't give up composition in 1927 and wrote *The Lily Maid*, which the composer Alan Bush (1900-95) called 'one of the most beautiful and one of the most truly original operas of recent times.' It was given at Stroud in Gloucestershire and at the Winter Gardens Theatre in London then came *The Ever Young*, a kind of companion piece to *The Immortal Hour*, based on an Irish legend of the Sidhe and Tír-nan-Óg; it was performed at Bath in 1935. Other works soon followed; *The Moon Maiden*, and *Galahad* and *Avalon* in the Arthurian Cycle, all of which took some forty years to complete. He composed these music-dramas with little or no hearings, though he fervently believed in their ultimate recognition, if not in his own lifetime then in some future era when the pendulum would, he felt, inevitably swing back in his favour.

Boughton's political views didn't help him to be recognized as a foremost opera composer, and he felt that we have come to the end of Christian civilization and that everything is falling to pieces.⁷ He declared that Russia pointed the way, and saw everything that was happening there as constructive, whereas destructive influences were constantly at work elsewhere. He believed that human rights violations in the Soviet Union were exaggerated, and visited Moscow in the late 1920s. He had no desire to leave England, though the hope of the future lay both for him and Alan Bush in accepting the principles of Communism, whilst regarding music as the only true religion. He tended to avoid the cities, with their fashionable musical circles, for a simpler rustic life. Like Holst he maintained that rhythm is the indispensable, physical experience in music, with melody the spiritual element. Also, like Cyril Scott and Arnold Bax, he believed that musically he was living in a period of decadence, and that there was a duty 'to fight against the fads and fashions of... 'modernism'' (Hurd, p. 242).

In 1934, he produced a book, 'The Reality of Music' (Kegan Paul)), written at the same time that Cyril Scott was working on his 'Music, its Secret Influence...', and John Foulds his 'Music To-day'. The work is not concerned with esotericism, but we can detect some knowledge of the Mysteries here and there, perhaps gained from his contact with the Avalonians, for he deplores what he calls the extreme interpretation of sacrifice in the Catholic Mass, which he calls a low conception of religious mystery (p. 102). Christianity, for him, was in its death-throes, and in his historical survey of Western music he writes, for instance, of plain-song expressing the anti-communal spirit which underlies the ecclesiastical distortions of Jesus's teaching.

However, most of the book is about the decadence of capitalist civilization, whilst Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1913) comes in for some particularly harsh criticism, described as 'the black magic of hysteria, pessimism, and cruelty'... 'rhythmically rambling and thematically dull', with 'noises which combine the ineptitudes of the savage with the extravagance which has always characterised decadent civilizations.' No punches pulled there, then, and he sees all such dissonant music as evidence of a failing civilization and mental disintegration... part of the general breakdown (p. 174); nor is he concerned with any afterlife. 'Beyond death, what matter?' he says. 'We have already experienced death in great music. Every time we have heard a musical work of any deep significance we have died to the world' (pp. 221-2). Boughton also deplores the fact that the public 'has little understanding of the fact that to listen to music is itself an art. So-called study in musical appreciation merely diverts the mind from the life of music to its history and anatomy' (p. x). John Foulds, writing at the same time, agreed with this, saying that the good composer 'enriches the familiar with such a wealth of collateral attributes as to ensure continual discovery of new beauties and subtleties which are not to be grasped upon the first hearing. And yet its first and obvious appeal must be great enough to engage the unwavering attention.' ('Music To-day', Op. 92, London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd. 1934, pp. 115-6).

For Boughton, music is the purest form of reason, 'the dissolution of the problems the music posits, then solves during its course.' Logic, lucidity, fusion of emotion and structure, arguments in which every link is important until inevitability is reached... all, he says, can be found in both music and mathematics. He refers to J.W.N. Sullivan's work on Beethoven, but denies any mystic expression in favour of the mathematical element which yields 'a perfect satisfaction to the human mind. If Einstein

was correctly reported,' he says, 'mathematics offers the key to the understanding of the phenomena of Nature.' In Nature itself he discerned *'the ideal of a mathematical simplicity'* and believed that the human mind, *'the peak of the spiral of natural evolution, finds in music a perfect sound-language; and the synthesis effected by the great masters of music result in effects so marvellous that they seem mysterious'* (pp. 227-8).

So much for mysticism; Boughton stays firmly with the realities of material life, which makes one wonder why he was so attracted to faerie lore and the works of Fiona Macleod and other nature-mystics. Having traced the various stages of musical growth from a merely rhythmic art to its fullest orchestral and dramatic forms, surveying all the developments in rhythm, melody, polyphony and harmony, he links music to human desires and the needs which created it, plus communal relationships... for music, he believes, has always been based on something real in human life. And inspiration for him has nothing to do with 'the beyond' but involves the subconscious becoming conscious. Bach, Beethoven and Wagner (always, for Boughton, the three greatest masters) were able to give expression to the needs and unformulated desires of their times by withdrawing from consciousness, then returning with something previously unimaginable, but he held that modern arts have gone wrong because life itself has gone wrong as civilization decays, and he felt that it was now too late to save things. He comes close to Cyril Scott in declaring that *'religion has been exposed and outgrown... Whatever was once valid in religion has been taken over and rendered more valid by science and law, leaving only those mystico-mathematical workings of the subconscious mind which come to consciousness in forms of beauty'* (p. 241). Boughton also reflects the views of Scott, the theosophists, and D.H. Lawrence (especially in that author's posthumous 'Apocalypse') when he declares that the only hope is in 'wholeness', a 'living union' with all mankind – here and now. Scott called the evil which prevents the consummation of life *separateness*, Boughton and Lawrence *isolationism*. The reality of music and all the arts depends, the composer asserts, on the communal principle which the great masters knew instinctively, whilst art depends on real life for its inspiration.

Boughton resigned from the Communist Party, like so many others, after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. After his death at the age of 82, there were a few attempts to revive interest in his music, with semi-staged productions of *The Queen of Cornwall* and *Alkestis*, and there was a first performance of his *Reunion Variations* in 1967. The late Michael Hurd encouraged BBC broadcasts of operatic excerpts and helped establish the Boughton Trust. *The Immortal Hour* was broadcast in 1979 under Vilem Tausky and in 1985 came a fully-staged production of *The Lily Maid* (No. 5 in the Arthurian cycle). 1996 saw the creation of the Glastonbury Arts Festival to promote art and music, based on Boughton's original ideas, but this festival charity went into liquidation the same year. However, the re-publication of Hurd's book in 1993 led to renewed interest and it almost looked as though the composer had arrived at long last.

At present, there has been that new recording of *The Queen of Cornwall*, a setting of the Thomas Hardy play and thought to be Boughton's best stage work. We have also seen new recordings of *Symphony No. 1 (Oliver Cromwell)* of 1904, three of the five *Songs of the English* for baritone and orchestra and twenty-three other songs, with Dutton Epoch and Hyperion recording other works. The reviewer Nick Barnard, speaking about the recording of *The Songs of Rutland Boughton* (see below) said, *'To enjoy Boughton today I believe it is important to accept him for what he is in his own right. He is not a great composer but his music is always sincere, often beautiful and never less than interesting. Clearly he was a man who inspired – literally – those around him.'* The critic Janet Banks, speaking of a recent revival of *The Immortal Hour*, said, *'Many years on from the last Glastonbury Arts Festival, Celtic art and spirituality are in vogue again (but)... the audience at the opening night of Chrys Henning's new production did not, however, appear as spellbound as their predecessors.'* Although Boughton called the work 'a human emotional experience' rather than a drama of incident and action, Janet Banks pointed out that good opera needs both, finding this modern production 'too static', adding that a 1990s audience was *'perhaps too cynical to be able to watch a tale of faerie without the occasional snigger.'*

A weekend Boughton Festival in Hitchin featured performances of some chamber music and songs, and the Music Trust's Paul Adrian Rooke continues to work hard to promote the music, rather like the efforts of Desmond Scott and his daughter Amanta to produce Cyril Scott's unknown works. Martin Lovell, writing in the October 2006 Boughton Music Trust Newsletter, felt that *'the recordings of his orchestral and instrumental works have certainly revealed music of immense charm, considerable craft and a very idiosyncratic sense of scoring. But in a land which has produced up to 1,000 symphonies and similar quantities of string quartets and other works, I will have to search my soul very carefully before I place Boughton in the top 20 of those composers.'* As far as the operas go, Lovell tends to agree with Michael Hurd, former Music Trust Adviser, that the finest works are very moving, with genuine originality, and inhabiting a world uniquely their own.

See also [the 2010 MWI article](#) commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death.

Notes

¹ 'Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals' – Michael Hurd (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993, p. 18).

² 'Composers' Gallery' – Donald Brook (Rockcliff 1946, p. 30).

³ Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was also a prophet of a new age of fellowship, spiritual transformation, feminism and the gay liberation movement. It is also possible that he, Boughton and Holst were set upon the road to Socialism by reading Walt Whitman's poems, 'Leaves of Grass'. Carpenter studied Eastern religions and the Bhagavad-Gītā, again like Holst, and was equally determined to approach Hinduism directly from its source, travelling to Ceylon and India. His mystic brand of socialism led to campaigns to promote vegetarianism, anti-vivisection, and nudism. He also foresaw the dangers of air pollution and always aimed for a simplification of life, writing many works on homosexuality, pacifism and socialism.

⁴ She believed that the key to the whole idea of Glastonbury lay within the immediate landscape, a circle measuring 10 miles across and 30 miles around, with the twelve signs of the zodiac marked out on the ground as huge figures, partly natural and partly created by the ancients thousands of years ago. Her book, 'A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars' was published by James Clarke in 1929, in which she related the figures to incidents in the Arthurian Grail romances, but many writers have cast serious doubts about the zodiac, saying that one can discern patterns, figures or anything else, just as a child might see pictures in the coals of a fire, or in clouds in the sky.

⁵ Sacred geometry highlights the cosmic significance of geometric forms, observed in the design of temples, monuments, churches and some holy wells, in the belief that geometry and mathematical ratios are also found in music and the cosmos, gematria involving the conversion of the letters of a word into number equivalents. By adding up their sum, then substituting another word to realize the same total, hidden meanings are revealed to those aware of the codes. The system is said to have originated with the Hebrew 22-letter alphabet, and was used by Gnostics and Kabbalists. Frederick Bligh Bond was a Freemason and member of the Theosophical Society in 1895, also the Society for Psychical Research in 1902, and revealed that he had used gematria and psychical methods during the excavations of the ruins. He later became a Rosicrucian and a Ghost Club member, all of which contributed to his dismissal by a Church of England bishop in 1921. Undeterred by the disapproval of his spiritualistic methods he became editor of 'Psychic Science' (1921-6) before emigrating to the U.S.A. to become education secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research, editing the magazine 'Survival' and eventually returning to England, but not before being consecrated as a bishop in the Old Catholic Church of America in 1933, an offshoot of the Episcopal Church. In 2008, Channel 4 TV thought it worthwhile to produce a programme, 'The Ghosts of Glastonbury', with presenter Tony

Robinson examining Bond's claims to have received archaeological information through automatic writing, from long-dead monks who had once occupied the Abbey.

⁶ The annual Festival doesn't take place in the town but at Worthy Farm, Pilton, six miles away. It is the largest open-air arts festival in the world, with well over 150,000 attending, and it all started in the late '60s when many 'hippies', searching for life's meaning, came to Glastonbury, setting up communes and craft workshops, and experimenting with alternative lifestyles. It has since attracted many people to the area, resulting in New Age shops, vegetarian cafés, lectures, workshops on spiritual matters and healing, also 'tribal gatherings', Goddess conferences, crop circle symposia, mystery plays, rock music 'gigs', and dance and children's festivals – a true mecca for alternative spirituality but a far cry from the quiet town I visited in the early '60s.

⁷ Perhaps Boughton was right in his assessment. Many people today seem to feel that the human experience is reaching a climax and that we are now, more so today than in Boughton's time, seeing tremendous upheavals and dramatic changes in a period that some have called 'a time of trial on earth, with the bulk of humanity living in a cultural trance' or 'in a veil of delusion amidst an ego-based mind-set.' Is this what Arnold Bax foresaw in his 'Maya' poem, with humanity seemingly seduced by materialism, war and conquest? And did he also see, like the 7th-century Mayan prophet Pacal Votan, that mankind must return to living in Natural Time to save itself from biospheric destruction? The world indeed does seem to be steeped in fear, brutality, pain, disease, famine, confusion, greed, corruption, addiction and ignorance. So will a new consciousness emerge to lift this veil, waking us from the trance that binds us, and leading to a new age of harmony? For that to happen, *we must be the change*, living in abundant expectancy but with no expectations and a life based on wholeness and strength, without looking for final solutions (of which there are none), and identifying consciously with the process that removes blocked energy. Then, because *we* are different, nothing will be the same. Many of today's more positive thinkers always insist on such a change which starts with oneself – *where we are now* – and instead of focusing on what is wrong, unsatisfactory and lacking in society, they lay the stress on what we, as individuals, might accomplish by staying open to new possibilities... to shift the balance, set the changes in motion and thus create a new reality.

Some Boughton CDs

Music-Drama: The Immortal Hour – Soloists/The Geoffrey Mitchell Choir/English Chamber Orchestra/Alan G. Melville on Hyperion;

Bethlehem – a Choral Drama adapted from the Coventry Nativity Play – Soloists/The Holst Singers/The New London Children's Choir/City of London Sinfonia/Alan G. Melville on Hyperion;

Music-Drama: The Queen of Cornwall – Soloists/Members of the London Chorus/New London Orchestra/Ronald Corp on Dutton Epoch;

Symphony No. 2 ('Deirdre': a Celtic Symphony, 1927); Symphony No. 3 in B minor (1937) – BBC P.O/Edward Downes on Carlton Classics, originally from BBC Sound Archive. *Symphony No. 3* is also coupled with *Oboe Concerto No. 1* – Sarah Francis, oboe/RPO/Vernon Handley on Hyperion/Helios;

Flute Concerto; String Concerto; Aylesbury Games; Three Folk Dances – Emily Beynon, flute/New London Orchestra/Ronald Corp on Hyperion;

Songs of Rutland Boughton – Louise Mott, mezzo/Alexander Taylor, piano, a BMS (British Music Society) recording sponsored by the Rutland Boughton Music Trust, which sadly no longer exists. The 23 songs on this recording include *Five Celtic Love Songs* (1910) to poems by Fiona Macleod, and *Songs of Womanhood* (1911) by Christina Walshe, often called his second wife, though they were never married. Three of these are protest songs for women's rights, whilst the *Symbol Songs* (1920) are from poems by Mary Richardson, Boughton's third wife, notorious for having slashed Velazquez's 'Rokeby

Venus' at the National Gallery as a protest, again for women's rights. Boughton seems to have been surrounded by fiercely aggressive women, intent on bringing about their voting rights. John Foulds, too, was friendly with some activists who founded the journal 'Votes for Women' in 1907, which also did *him* no favours with the Establishment.

Oboe Music 'Joyance' on Oboe Classics