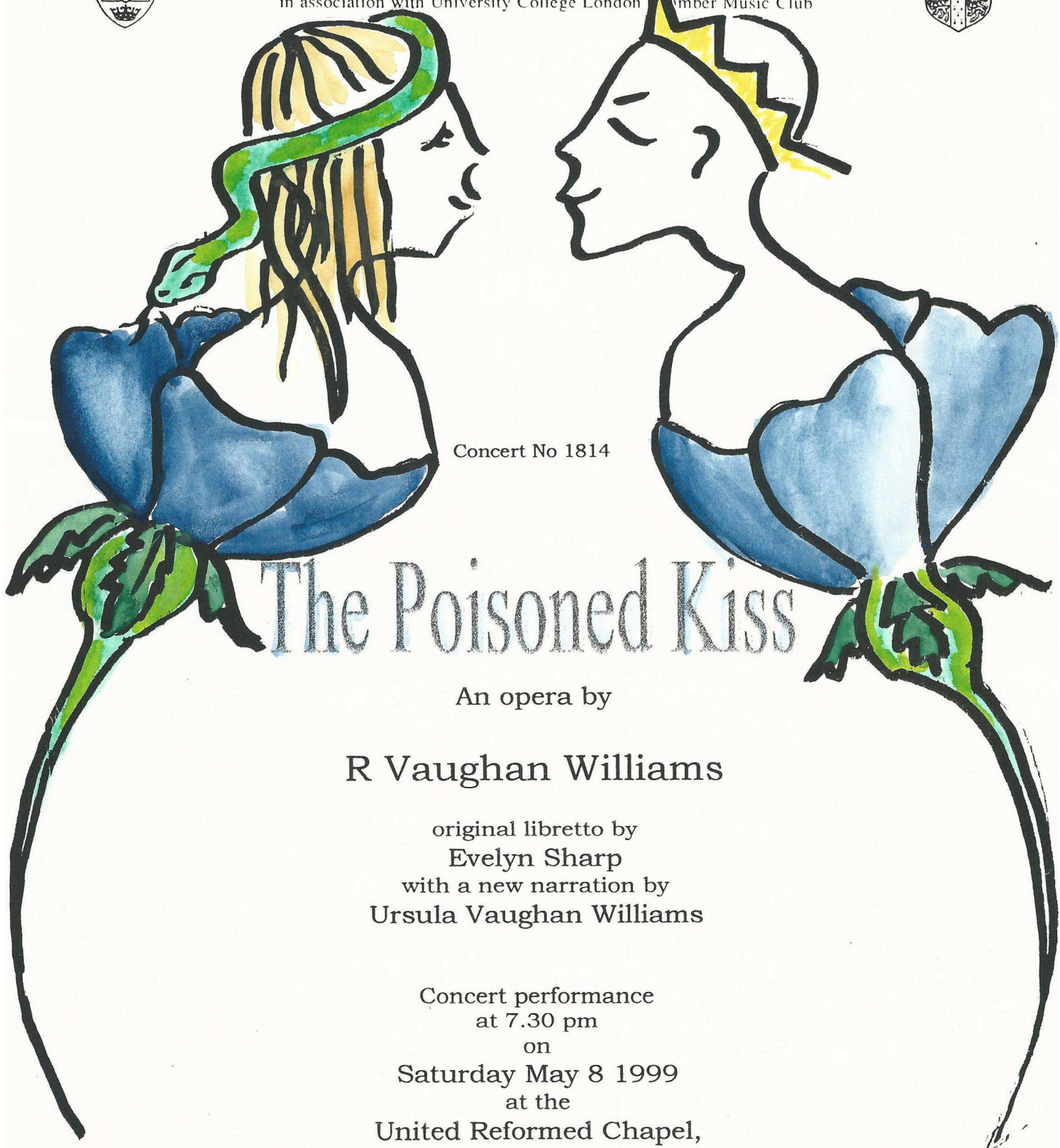




OXFORD & CAMBRIDGE MUSICAL CLUB

in association with University College London Chamber Music Club



Concert No 1814

The Poisoned Kiss

An opera by

R Vaughan Williams

original libretto by
Evelyn Sharp
with a new narration by
Ursula Vaughan Williams

Concert performance
at 7.30 pm
on
Saturday May 8 1999
at the
United Reformed Chapel,
Pond Square, Highgate

Admission (for non-members) £5





OXFORD & CAMBRIDGE MUSICAL CLUB
in association with University College London Chamber Music Club



Concert No. 1814

The Poisoned Kiss

or

The Empress and the Necromancer

A concert performance
of the romantic extravaganza by
R. Vaughan Williams

libretto by Evelyn Sharp
with a narration based on the linking dialogue by
Ursula Vaughan Williams

United Reformed Chapel
Pond Square, Highgate

7.30 p.m.
May 8 1999

PROGRAMME

CAST

in order of appearance

DIPSACUS, a professional magician	Michael Crowe
GALLANTHUS, the Prince's attendant	Carl Murray
ANGELICA, Tormentilla's maid and companion	Lyn Parkyns
NARRATOR, the Empress' physician	*Colin Pinney
Dipsacus' hobgoblins:	
HOB	Donald Storer
GOB	William Emery
LOB	Julian Zerfahs
AMARYLLUS, the Prince, son of the Empress	Alan Mayall
TORMENTILLA, Dipsacus' daughter	Jo Parton
Empress' assistants:	
MEDIUM 1	*Jenny Albon
MEDIUM 2	Ruth Pitman
MEDIUM 3	*Jenny Norman
EMPRESS PERSICARIA, sovereign of Golden Town and amateur magician	Oenone Forrester

CHORUS

Day & Night Voices, Hobgoblins, Witches & Forest Creatures,
Milliners & Messenger Boys, Flower Girls, Lovers

Margaret Bond	Jo Rodgers	*John Beasley	Giles de la Mare
Margot Boss	Helen Shaw	Brian Blandford	*Anthony
Mary Storer	Penny Vinson		Hetherington
		Michael Scott	Richard Shaw

ORCHESTRA

Violin	Evelyn Chadwick (leader) *Margaret Banwell *Jenni Cooper *Emily Edwards Michael Friess *Becky Green *Helen Greenhalgh Shirley Karney Hilary Orr Peter Wall	Flute	Camilla Bignall (piccolo) William Phipps oboe & cor anglais Clare Shanks clarinet John Macfarlane Richard Proudfoot bassoon Jeremy Wilson
Viola	*Sophie Bircumshaw Keith Daley Bernard Gilonis Patricia Marshall	horn	Peter Kaldor Adrian Rushton trumpet *Frank Burgum *Paul Franklin trombone*Charles Macworth- Brown
Cello	*Rosemary Jiggins Laura Forbes Donald Munro	harp	*Louisa Duggan
Bass	Peter Peacock David Soulsby	timpani	Andrew Westlake percussion *Barbara Jane Waddell *Christina East
			*guest

conducted by Alan Reddish

Vaughan Williams & the stage

By the time he wrote *The Poisoned Kiss*, in the late 1920s (and his fifties), Vaughan Williams' very individual style was fully formed: hymns and folksongs, the first 3 symphonies, *On Wenlock Edge*, *The Wasps*, the *Tallis Fantasia*, *The Lark Ascending*, *Flos Campi* were well behind him. He had already completed several stage works, illustrating the very diverse worlds his idiom could inhabit, from the early 'ballad opera' *Hugh the Drover*, the visionary *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, the ballet *Old King Cole*, and the masque *On Christmas Night*, to the recently completed *Sir John in Love* (defying comparison with Verdi's *Falstaff*). He was working at about the same time on two further stage works showing a new austerity, even violence: the stark *Riders to the Sea*, after J.M.Synge, and *Job, a masque for dancing*, after Blake, with the vehement 4th symphony not far away. Only a continuing preoccupation with *The Pilgrim's Progress* remained, as an operatic project not to be completed until the 1950s.

Against this background, it is typical of his unpredictability that he should also want to apply himself to a light operetta, reminiscent of Gilbert & Sullivan (with a glance back at Edward German and forward to Ivor Novello) — though needless to say with his unmistakable accent throughout. It has to be conceded that in his librettist Evelyn Sharp (sister of his old friend and fellow folk-song collector Cecil Sharp) he did not find his Gilbert. She assembled a suitably paradoxical plot from incidents in Richard Garnett's *The Poison Maid* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rapaccini's Daughter*, but the facetious text has often been seen as something of a millstone — though by now the Betjeman-like references to daylight saving, state control, Freud, 'the pictures', 'adverts' and so on have a certain period charm. The opera, with some revisions, did not reach the stage until 1936, in Cambridge, and there were further revisions in the 50s. In particular, the extensive spoken dialogue (but not the sung text) was replaced, in a new version by Ursula Vaughan Williams. For the present concert performance most of this dialogue is summarised in a narration (with Mrs Vaughan Williams' blessing).

But libretto problems or no, it is fascinating to hear the range of popular reference that Vaughan Williams, so easily circumscribed by epithets like 'folky', 'visionary' or 'pastoral', can in fact comfortably embrace, with waltzes, a tango and a fox-trot as well as ballads, love-duets both fervent and flippant, and magic that spills over from the spurious to the heartstopping — even to some self-parody in admitted 'galumphing'. If you think you know your RVW you may be in for some surprises...

SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time a young Magician and a young Empress hoped to marry, but her parents forbade the match. Both young people married others. But the magician, Dipsacus, hot for revenge against the Empress whom he, wrongly, blamed, brought up his only daughter, Tormentilla, on poisons, so that the first man she kissed would die. He knew the Empress had a son and he planned that his daughter should be the cause of her son's death

The Empress, cleverer than he, knew of this and brought up her son, Amaryllus, on antidotes. So that when fate brought the young people together and inevitably made them fall in love, the first kiss was not fatal, though at first it seemed so, for Amaryllus fainted from pure joy. When he was brought home he did nearly die from the pain of being separated from his love.

Eventually the Empress relented and allowed Tormentilla to see him. Amaryllus' happiness was so great that his mother was touched to the heart. She summoned Dipsacus — long a widower as she had been long a widow —and all differences were healed. Not only did he and the Empress marry, but also her ladies in waiting married his attendant hobgoblins. The prince, of course, married Tormentilla, while her faithful companion, Angelica, married his friend and squire, Gallanthus.

And they all lived happily ever after.

UVW

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Overture

The audience is requested not to refrain from talking during the overture. Otherwise they will know all the tunes before the opera begins.

RVW

ACT I

- 1 Opening chorus* Voices of Night and Day struggle for mastery before Dipsacus' house in the forest. Night wins.
- 2 Scena: Gallanthus* 'What's that? A cat?' — sinister distractions as dawn gradually breaks.
- 3 Scena: Angelica* Day is dawning' as she gets on with the dusting.
- 4 Duet* It's really time I did begin...' the early stages of flirtation - and feminism.
- 5 Ensemble* 'Here we come galumphing along' (without acknowledgement to Lewis Carroll). Dipsacus berates his lazy Hobgoblins.
- 6 Duet ; Dipsacus & Angelics* 'I'm a sorcerer bold...' Gilbertian patter, updated with 'state-control' and 'Freud'.
- 7 Duet: Amaryllus & Gallanthus* 'It's true I'm inclined to be fickle..' A chastely British version of Leporello's 'catalogue' aria.
- 8 Ensemble* 'Lullaby, lovely serpent of mine' First the serpent, then a poison cocktail: Amaryllus has yet to learn.
- 9 Duet: Amaryllus & Tormentilla* 'Blue larkspur in a garden.../ Black henbane in a thicket...' Contrasting views of the romantic.
- 10 Ensemble* 'North wind, South wind' A (Phrygian rather than Aeolian) summons brings a storm that blows the lovers apart.
- 11 Song: Tormentilla* 'Oh, who would be unhappy me' - a toxicological ballad.
- 12 Entry Music* A frothy wisp of frocks and millinery.
- 13 Finale* 'All is ready' The spell of banishment is recalled with difficulty, and Golden Town beckons.

SHORT (5 minute) INTERVAL

ACT II

- 14 *Introduction* Tormentilla's apartment in Golden Town
 15 *Chorus: Flower Girls* 'Here we come, our hands full laden'
 - with an air of bored nonchalance.
 16 *Song: Angelica & Chorus* 'By all the powers Ne'er saw I such flowers!'
 - in exuberantly syncopated waltz-time.
 17 *Trio: Hob, Gob & Lob* 'Ho there!' Scheming Hobgoblins
 with a quasi-liturgical prophecy of doom.
 18 *Duet: Angelica & Gallanthus* 'It does not appear to you to be clear....'
 Class - and money - consciousness below stairs.
 19 *Trio: Mediums* 'If you want to escape from the tedium....'
 Magic, mystery - and more financial calculation.
 20 *Chorus of Lovers* 'Tormentilla! Passion fills us!'
 A serenade, with guitars, for her entrance.
 21 *Song: Tormentilla & Duet with Angelica* 'There was a time...'
 Statutory melancholy at bed-time.
 22 *Ensemble* 'Twas here it bade me follow...' The Hobgoblins'
 machinations are almost confounded by Angelica
 23 *Serenade: Amaryllis & Duet with Tormentilla* 'Dear love behold,'
 Amaryllus gets to see Tormentilla in the end,
 24 *Ensemble* 'Voices fill the enchanted air' and we soon reach
 a full-blown love duet, and the Poisoned Kiss itself.
 25 *Finale* 'Too dark for me has been my fate'
 Tragedy after all?

INTERVAL of 20 minutes

ACT III

- 26 *Introduction* Boudoir of the Empress Persicaria in Golden Town
 27 *Trio: Mediums* 'Behold our mystic exercises', doing the housework
 to the tango, before the Empress appears.
 28 *Ensemble* 'Monstrous vision! Hence, oh hence!'
 Not liking what the crystal shows, the Empress
 dashes it to the floor, and the Sun disappears.
 29 *Ballad: Empress* 'When I was young...'
 Statutory nostalgia.
 30 *Ensemble* 'You can leave us...'
 The Empress dismisses the mediums, who evanesce...
 31 *Duet: Empress & Tormentilla* 'Love breaks all rules...'
 and reconciliation begins.
 32 *Invocation: Empress & chorus* 'Imps and demons, gods and elves',
 Dipsacus must be summoned too,
 33 *Ensemble* 'Come O gentle powers of light',
 and shown a vision of the young lovers.
 34 *Duet: Empress & Dipsacus* Can you remember the days when first we met?
 Reconciliation continues, for the older generation.
 35 *Quartet* 'Love in a hut, Is picturesque, but —'
 Both generations look forward to married life.
 36 *Sextet* 'Horrid monster! Hence! away!' Mediums &
 Hobgoblins converge to make three more couples.
 37 *Duet: Gallanthus & Angelica* It's the proper thing to do', finally making up
 the sixth couple (ready for the palais de danse).
 38 *Finale* 'Love has conquered!'