

Brass and military

- Ⓝ **Holst** *The Planets*, H125 (arr. Roberts)^a. A Moor-side Suite, H173. **Hallé Choir; Black Dyke Mills Band / James Watson.** Doyen Master Series © DOYCD050 (67 minutes: DDD).

Completed nearly 80 years ago, Holst's *The Planets* remains one of the most popular English works of all time. Some movements have been re-scored for brass band before, but only now has the complete work been transcribed for the genre. Commissioned to celebrate Doyen's fiftieth CD release, it has been expertly transcribed by Stephen Roberts, who paints his Holst a whole tone lower than in the original to spectacular effect.

Premiered in concert at Birmingham's Symphony Hall last November, it has been reworked for the surprisingly effective cosmic cocktail of brass band, two harps, celeste and choir. Opening with the menacing, almost hypnotic "Mars", "Venus" gives Roberts his biggest headache, but by intelligent use of mutes, harps and celeste the music glistens and sparkles appropriately; sensitive soprano cornet, flugelhorn and plaintive tenor horn are wonderfully evocative. "Mercury" calls for great delicacy and rhythmic poise from the performers, and these fine musicians deliver with panache. Only in "Jupiter" does joviality prove difficult, but this is soon forgotten when the big tune ("I vow to thee my country") is given the brazen brass treatment. Then "Saturn": tense, terrifying and desolate in turn. The thrills of "Uranus" will make you sit up, as will the soft *pianissimos* of "Neptune" and the magical, ethereal ending courtesy of the Hallé Choir.

A Moorside Suite, the first work to be written for brass band by a major British composer, was composed in 1928. As Paul Hindmarsh says of the Black Dyke Mills's performance in his excellent insert-notes, "Holst would have admired the ... rhythmic poise of the Scherzo, the eloquent restraint of the Nocturne ... and the measured tread of the March".

This disc may not suit the orchestral purist, but it is of interest for its creative retake on *The Planets* and for the added bonus of Holst's only work for band. An intriguing addition to anyone's CD library and highly recommended. **Richard Robinson**
James Watson is interviewed on page 122

- Ⓝ **London Salute Regimental Band of the Coldstream Guards / Major D. J. Marshall.** Bandleader © BND65119; Ⓛ BNA5119 (70 minutes: DDD).

Marshall: London salute. **Ketèlbey:** Cockney Suite. **Farnon:** Westminster waltz. **Steck:** Birdcage Walk. **Herman:** Clarinet on the town. **Bayco:** Royal Windsor. **Coates:** London Suite. **Maschwitz:** A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square. **Creswick:** Cockney cocktail. **Gershwin:** A foggy day in London Town. **Elgar:** Cockaigne, Op. 40. **Myddleton:** The boys of the old brigade. **Nicholls:** When the Guards are on parade. **Hamm** (arr. Rogan): The Coldstream march.

Who better to perform a salute to London Town than a Guards band? They have traipsed its streets for centuries, and given concerts in its cathedrals, parks and historic places.

The fact that a well-known march, *Royal Windsor*, appears on the programme is due to the heavy work-load of a Guards band for, as with the tourist, if it's Tuesday it must be Buckingham Palace – or is it Windsor Castle? We are taken on a grand tour starting with Albert Ketèlbey's *Cockney Suite*, a bandstand favourite of former years with its 'Appy 'Ampstead jollifications cocking a snook at "A State Procession". (In the Performing Rights Society's gazette of 1929 Ketèlbey was voted Britain's greatest living composer, but they couldn't get his Christian name or accent right.) Eric Coates is sure to be featured in such a programme and his "Covent Garden" and "Knightsbridge" are visited along with *Birdcage Walk*, the Royal Hospital at Chelsea and calling on that nightingale in Berkeley Square. Gershwin has *A Foggy Day in London Town* and a solo clarinet has a night on the town. And then there is what must be the first ever recording of Elgar's overture, *Cockaigne* ("In London Town") by a military band.

Don't miss this tour of our capital city by expert guides looking for no tips, and the drum major's mace acting as the tour guide's umbrella. **Rodney Bashford**

- Ⓝ **The Origin of the Species** Virtuoso Victorian brass music from Cyfarthfa Castle. **John Wallace** (cornet); **The Wallace Collection / Simon Wright.** Nimbus © NI5470 (74 minutes: DDD). **Verdi:** Nabucco – Overture. **Paganini:** Carneval de Venise. **Sullivan:** The lost chord. **Levy:** The whirlwind polka. **Montgomery:** My daughter's schottische. **Sainton-Dolby:** Triumphal march. **Méhul** (attrib. Mozart): *L'Irato* – Overture. **Bawden:** Cyfarthfa Castle quadrilles. **J. Parry:** Tydfil overture. **Hérol:** Zampa – Overture. **Sontag** (attrib. Wagner): Nibelungen march.

Of all contemporary brass band recordings currently available, this disc has to be one of the most curious and intriguing of them all. For whilst orchestras have been using period instruments for years, bands have generally neglected their heritage. Until now, that is. Performed on Victorian instruments, the music was composed and arranged for the professional Welsh private band Cyfarthfa, which was founded in 1838 and survived until the turn of the century, employing only Britain's finest brass players.

Musicologist Trevor Herbert and trumpeter John Wallace have managed to re-create the music through the innovative Wallace Collection, achieving a near-miracle in the process, resulting in a disc that is an essential buy for any serious collector of British music. As Herbert explains in his concise insert-note, "these recordings unveil a lost performance tradition that helps explain the origins that became known as a brass band."

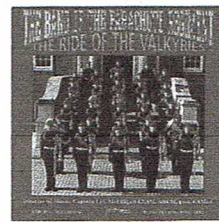
The bespoke music reflects the high standards of the original performers, illustrated in Verdi's *Nabucco*, Hérol's *Zampa* (just listen to the superb vulgarity of the ophicleides!) and Paganini's *Carneval de Venise*. Sullivan's melancholy *The lost chord* is performed by the sensitively understated keyed bugle soloists of Ralph Dudgeon and Stephen Hollamby, which is followed by Wallace's virtuosic reading of Jules Levy's cornet solo, *The whirlwind polka*.

Cyfarthfa Band doubled as a dance band, so it is no surprise that Montgomery's *My daughter's schottische* and Bawden's *Cyfarthfa Castle quadrilles* are included. Méhul's overture, *L'Irato* and Sainton-Dolby's *Triumphal march* are enjoyable, but the treat is the inclusion of the oldest known work for band, Joseph Parry's *Tydfil overture*; technically demanding, it's a gem which has thankfully been preserved. The disc ends with Wagner's wondrously barbaric *Nibelungen march*. Period brass instruments are pea-shooters compared with their broader-sounding contemporary counterparts. This leads to a thinner, slightly rougher texture than contemporary orchestral brass, where overblowing is sparingly used to exciting effect.

A rare disc that is by turn unique, eclectic, virtuosic and brilliant. We should be thankful for the foresight of John Wallace, Nimbus, and the Sherlock Holmes of the brass band, Trevor Herbert, who rediscovered the lost manuscripts at Cyfarthfa Castle. **Richard Robinson**

- Ⓝ **The Ride of the Valkyries Band of the Parachute Regiment / Captain I. D. McElligott.** Bandleader © BND65126; Ⓛ BNA5126 (68 minutes: DDD). **Wagner:** Die Walküre – The ride of the Valkyries (arr. Rippon/Keeling). Nibelungen march (arr. Stretton). **Brophy:** The three DG's. **Addison** (arr. Hicks): A bridge too far – The Dutch tragedy; A bridge too far. **McElligott:** Airborne advance. A festive fanfare and interlude. **Richards:** Stage centre. **Haan:** Oregon. **Kenny G** (arr. McElligott): Going home. **Brubeck:** A portrait in time – suite. **Menken** (arr. Moss): Beauty and the beast – Suite. **Reed:** Armenian dances, Part 1.

In spite of its title the programme is not too overloaded with music associated with airborne heroics. Certain items from films dealing with such



heroics have gone well past their sell-by date, but the only culprit here is *A bridge too far*, though the scene depicting "The Dutch tragedy" is welcome.

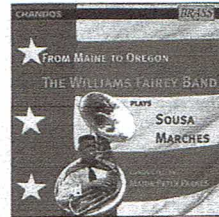
Apart from the regimental march which gives its name to the disc, more Wagner comes with his own great march on themes from *The Ring* known as *Nibelungen march*. The conductor supplies an effective march, *Airborne advance* and *A festive fanfare and interlude* for band and trumpets. Then half a dozen popular items to give the band a chance to show off their skills. Goff Richards's exciting *Stage centre* is followed by 'big country' music in the shape of *Oregon*, a fantasy portraying the state's vast forests and rivers, by Jacob de Haan. The atmosphere lightens with *Going home* on soprano saxophone, and a medley of tunes made famous or composed by Dave Brubeck – the great *Take Five*, *Rondo à la Turk*, *Summer Song* and *Unsquare Dance*. Worth buying for this alone.

Music from Walt Disney's *Beauty and the beast* and a finale of Alfred Reed's *Armenian dances* complete a varied and well-played programme, nicely off the beaten track. **Rodney Bashford**

- Ⓝ **Sousa** From Maine to Oregon. **Williams Fairey Band / Peter Parkes.**

Chandos © BBT4535; Ⓛ CHAN4535 (77 minutes: DDD).

Semper fidelis. The crusader. El capitan. The invincible eagle. King cotton. Hands across the sea. Manhattan beach. Our flirtation. The picadore. Gladiator. The free lance. The Wasington post. The beau ideal. The high school cadets. The thunderer. The fairest of the fair. The occidental. The liberty bell. Corcoran cadets. National fencibles. The black horse troop. The gridiron club. Directorate. The belle of Chicago.



Since 1993 the Williams Fairey Band have been as good as any band in the world and better than most. Peter Parkes built a team that just got better and better; in concert and competition they were setting standards that others were trying hard to

emulate. Then Parkes and the band parted company and their swansong is this CD. I met Parkes in Manchester on the weekend he and the band were recording these marches and I know he enjoyed it as much as anything he had ever done; in addition his research into the marches had shown him just what a genius of the genre Sousa was, everything so simple, but so exciting.

The notes by Parkes himself are extensive, interesting, and reflect his love for these marches. The band is everything you would expect from this well-honed music machine, and the conductor takes the business seriously. He never sacrifices the shape or structure of the pieces for the excitement of sheer speed. It might be said that in the overly ambient acoustic of Manchester Grammar School anything taken too fast would be completely inaudible, and some listeners might find the degree of echo a little irksome. For me the weakness of this recording is the fact that all the tracks are arrangements for brass band of marches written for wind band, and I find the lack of non-brass voices disappointing. In truth I yearn for my (privately made) recording of these marches by The United States Marine Band, who gave the first performances of many of them.

Sousa was a great fiddler with his scores, forever changing things in rehearsal, and often at the actual performance. The drum parts in particular are very idiosyncratic, and I find this recording doesn't quite have the finesse I look for. However, as a testament to the chemistry that existed at the time between Parkes and the Williams Fairey Band