



NOTES EN FRANÇAIS



SOMMCD 094

ADD

**SIR ADRIAN BOULT** conducts music by  
**WILLIAM WALTON** (1902 - 1983)

PHILHARMONIC PROMENADE ORCHESTRA  
(LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA)

LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR  
DENNIS NOBLE, Baritone  
Chorus Master: Frederick Jackson  
Leader: Joseph Shadwick

**SYMPHONY No. 1** (1935)

**BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST** (1931)

**Symphony No. 1 in Bb minor \***

1. Allegro assai	14:11
2. Scherzo: Presto con malizia	6:32
3. Andante con malinconia	9:50
4. Maestoso - Allegro brioso	13:14

**Belshazzar's Feast \*\***

1. Thus spake Isaiah	5:27
2. If I forget thee O Jerusalem	2:14
3. By the waters of Babylon	3:15
4. Babylon was a great city	3:57

9
10
11
12
13
14

**Belshazzar's Feast (Contd.)**

5. Praise ye	5:00
6. Thus in Babylon	2:50
7. And in that same hour	1:53
8. Then sing aloud to God	4:36
9. The trumpeters and pipers	1:19
10. Then sing aloud to God	4:05

**Total duration 78:24**

\* Recorded in Aug.15 - 31 1956

\*\* Recorded in Sept.10 - 14 1953

Full texts printed in the booklet

Executive Producer and Transfers: Arthur Ridgwell Digital Re-mastering: Toby Moore

Recording Location: Walthamstow Assembly Hall, London E17

\* Nixa NCL 16020 \*\* Nixa NLP 904

This compilation and digital re-mastering © & © SOMM Recordings

Front Cover Design: Andrew Giles

Design & Layout: Keith Oke

© & © 2009 SOMM RECORDINGS • THAMES DITTON • SURREY • ENGLAND

Made in the UK

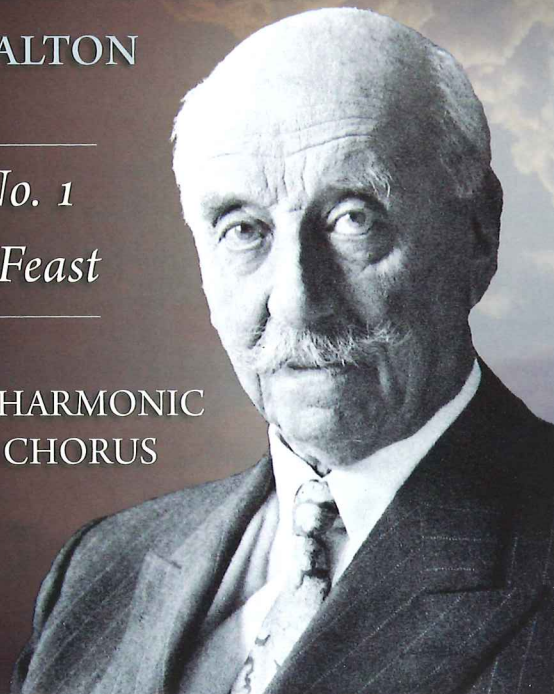


# SIR ADRIAN BOULT conducts WALTON

## *Symphony No. 1 Belshazzar's Feast*

LONDON PHILHARMONIC  
ORCHESTRA & CHORUS

DENNIS NOBLE  
baritone



It's easy to pigeonhole the fledgling composer William Walton as the brittle young thing who composed *Facade*, *Portsmouth Point* and *Siesta*, all jazz-influenced, during his salad days. But after only a few more years he had already tucked two concertos, a symphony and an oratorio under his belt.

The oratorio was *Belshazzar's Feast*, with a libretto learnedly compiled from the Old Testament by Osbert Sitwell, almost an adopted brother after Walton had been taken into the bosom of that ostentatiously artistic family. It had been commissioned by the BBC, and premiered at the 1931 Leeds Festival, where Thomas Beecham, director of the Festival, had advised the composer "As you'll never hear the thing again, my boy, why not throw in a couple of brass bands?"

And the brass bands are indeed there, used antiphonally, and part of an ensemble which also includes, alongside the normal symphony orchestra with extended woodwind and brass, alto saxophone, a vast percussion section (listen out for them in the march-past of the "false gods"), two harps, piano and organ.

But to return to the premiere of *Belshazzar's Feast*: the story of Dr Malcolm Sargent being brought in at the last minute to sort out the floundering choir is perhaps apocryphal, but he did conduct the hugely successful first performance which came after six months of rehearsal: one looks back at the equally floundering choir at the 1900 Birmingham premiere of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, trying to deliver that demanding work on a ridiculously restricted rehearsal-time of just a few weeks, and coached by an elderly, unsympathetic W.C. Stockley who had been dragged out of retirement to do the job.

*Belshazzar's Feast* falls into three distinct sections, each preceded and separated by some kind of recitative. Part One begins with a choral outburst from the prophet Isaiah, predicting the enslavement of the Israelites in Babylon. Part Two tells of the blasphemous Feast hosted by Belshazzar, Walton bringing all kinds of tinselly, jazzy instruments into play. There follows the famous interpretation of the writing on the wall, before Part Three's general rejoicing of the liberated Israelites, where spatial, antiphonal exchanges build an exhilarating fresco of sound.

Among the reviews of the October 8 premiere was a grumbling – and perhaps chilling, given the warclouds gathering – review from *The Times*: "Stark Judaism from first to last. It culminates in ecstatic gloating over the fallen enemy, the utter negation of Christianity". And as Michael Kennedy points out in *Portrait of Walton* (OUP 1989), these words made their mark on the ecclesiastical powers of the Three Choirs Festival, who refused to admit *Belshazzar's Feast* into their cathedrals until 1957.

Adrian Boult conducted the first London performance on November 25, with a remarkable ovation from the Queen's Hall audience.

Walton found much more trouble over the composition of his First Symphony. Hamilton Harty, conductor of the Halle Orchestra, had suggested the idea to him early in 1932, but soon afterwards the still young and chippy Walton's confidence may have been knocked sideways by the announcement that the BBC had commissioned a Third Symphony from the ageing Elgar, and Walton's own creative juices took a long time to flow.

The first two movements, the first angry with pulsating energy, the second an acerbic scherzo "con malizia", were completed comparatively quickly, but the slow movement, opening with a lamenting flute solo which makes us wonder whether Shostakovich, composing his own Fifth Symphony, had heard this one, took longer to emerge.

But then came total writer's block. Though Walton had sketched the beginning and ending of the finale, in a manner following the exultant perorations of Beethoven and Sibelius, he became stuck in the middle, and in fact the Symphony was given an incomplete (the first three movements only) performance at the Queen's Hall on December 3 1934 by the London Symphony Orchestra, of which by this time Hamilton Harty had become music director.

The writer's block had occurred both through professional reasons (Walton had been diverted into composing lucrative film scores) and personal ones: the ending of his affair with one aristocratic lady whose subsequent lover, a medical man, diagnosed his predecessor Walton as impotent, and the beginning of one with Alice, Viscountess Wimborne, 22 years his senior.

There were two more performances of this currently unfinished symphony, and then, at Constant Lambert's suggestion, Walton hit upon the idea of writing a fugue for the middle section of the finale; a recourse which worked triumphantly.

The at-last complete symphony was given its premiere at Queen's Hall on November 6 1935, Harty conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra. It was recorded by Decca only five weeks later. Critical reaction was mixed, but judgment nowadays sees the finale as an appropriate, blazing culmination to the anguish of the preceding movements. Some of us view Walton's First Symphony as the greatest ever written by an Englishman.

Adrian Boult was an ever-present catalyst in encouraging the development of William Walton. The two couldn't have come from more widely divergent backgrounds, Walton the working-class Lancastrian from Oldham who made it to Oxford University as a chorister, Boult, also a northerner (Chester), but born into the upper-middle-class.

But in his capacity as music director of the BBC during Walton's period of international emergence, Boult had a huge amount of influence, and instigated and presided over many performances of the composer's music.

It is piquantly ironic, then, that during the 1950s Boult and Walton were both vying with each other in the recording studio, Boult for Nixa (an offshoot of the Pye label) conducting the Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra (a contractual nom-de-plume for the London Philharmonic Orchestra), and Walton for HMV, conducting the prestigious, only recently-formed Philharmonia Orchestra.

But Boult scores on at least two counts. His reading of the Symphony is so wonderfully driven (an old man inspired by a young man's music), and brings out resonances of so many other composers in whose traditions Walton found himself steeped.

And his baritone soloist in *Belshazzar's Feast* was Dennis Noble, who had sung in the premiere under Malcolm Sargent in Leeds more than two decades earlier.

We think of Walton, and we think of Sargent, Previn, and all of today's bright young things who have followed on. But the continuous, shadowy presence was Adrian Boult, and these reissues restore that self-effacing conductor into the Walton pantheon..

© 2009 Christopher Morley

Il est un peu facile de classer le jeune William Walton sous l'étiquette du compositeur novice qui a commis *Façade*, *Portsmouth Point* et *Siesta*, d'inspiration jazzy, composés durant ses années de vaches maigres. Mais après seulement quelques années, il avait déjà accroché deux concertos, une symphonie et un oratorio à son tableau de chasse.

En ce qui concerne l'oratorio, il s'agissait de *La Fête de Belshazzar*, sur un livret érudit basé sur une compilation d'extraits de l'Ancien Testament réalisée par Osbert Sitwell, que l'on peut presque considérer comme un frère adoptif de Walton après que celui-ci ait été accueilli au sein de cette famille ouvertement artistique. Cette œuvre avait été commandée par la BBC, et fut créée au Festival de Leeds en 1931 lors duquel Thomas Beecham, directeur du festival, avait fait la suggestion suivante à Walton : « Compte tenu du fait que vous n'entendrez jamais plus cette partition, pourquoi ne pas y rajouter quelques pages de brass-band.

Et du brass-band, il y en a effectivement, utilisé de façon antiphonale, et faisant partie d'un ensemble comprenant également, outre l'orchestre symphonique traditionnel avec une petite harmonie et des cuivres en nombre, un saxophone alto, un grand pupitre de percussion (notamment dans le défilé des « false gods »), deux harpes, un piano et un orgue.

Mais revenons à la première de *La Fête de Belshazzar* : l'anecdote selon laquelle Dr Malcolm Sargent aurait été appelé à la dernière minute pour sortir le chœur de l'ornière est peut-être apocryphe, mais c'est lui qui, effectivement, dirigea avec grand succès la première exécution après six mois de répétition. Cet épisode évoque le souvenir d'un autre chœur chaotique, lors de la création du *Rêve de Gerontius* d'Elgar à Brimingham en 1900, qui s'efforça d'interpréter cette œuvre sur des échos et des effets antiphonaux traduisant une atmosphère de réjouissances.

Parmi les comptes-rendus parus suite au concert du 8 octobre, on citera notamment celui du Times, dont le ton râleur et glacial n'était sans doute pas sans rapport avec les prémices menaçants de la guerre : « Du strict judaïsme, du début à la fin. Le point culminant est une fête extatique pour célébrer la victoire sur l'ennemi, en un reniement ultime du Christianisme. Ces mots, ainsi que Michael Kennedy l'a remarqué dans son *Portrait de Walton* (OUP, 1989) ont laissé leur empreinte chez les représentants de l'autorité ecclésiastique en charge du Festival des Trois Chœurs : c'est ainsi qu'ils bannirent *La Fête de Belshazzar* de leurs cathédrales jusqu'en 1957.

Adrian Boult dirigea la création londonienne le 25 novembre, obtenant une formidable ovation du public du Queen's Hall.

Walton se confronta à davantage de difficultés lors de la composition de sa Première Symphonie. Hamilton Harty, chef de l'Orchestre de Halle, lui en avait suggéré l'idée au début de l'année 1932, mais apprenant, peu de temps après, que la BBC avait commandé une Troisième Symphonie au vieil Elgar, Walton se sentit atteint dans sa confiance, encore un peu verte, et son inspiration mit du temps à s'exprimer.

Les deux premiers mouvements, le premier colérique et traversé par une pulsation énergique, le second se présentant comme un scherzo mordant « con malizia », furent achevés assez rapidement, tandis que le mouvement lent, qui débute par une lamentation de la flûte solo dont on se demande si Chostakovitch ne l'aurait pas entendue avant de composer sa propre Cinquième Symphonie, prit beaucoup plus de temps à sortir des limbes.

Puis vint le syndrome de la page blanche. Bien que Walton ait tracer les grandes lignes du début et de la fin du dernier mouvement, dans le style des péroraisons exubérante de Beethoven et Sibélius, il se heurta à un mur lorsqu'il voulut aborder le développement. C'est donc sous une forme inachevée (les trois premiers mouvements seulement) que la Symphonie fut créée le 3 décembre 1934 au Queen's Hall, par l'Orchestre Symphonique de Londres sous la baguette de Hamilton Harty qui venait d'en devenir le directeur musical.

Le blocage du compositeur survint pour des raisons professionnelles (Walton avait été éloigné de son travail par des contrats lucratifs pour le cinéma), et personnelles : la fin d'une liaison avec une aristocrate dont le nouvel amant, un homme de médecine, l'avait diagnostiqué impuissant, et le début d'une autre avec Alice, Vicomtesse Wimborne, de 22 ans son aînée.

Deux autres auditions de la version inachevée de sa symphonie eurent lieu, puis, sur une idée de Constant Lambert, Walton décida d'écrire une fugue pour la section centrale de son finale, ce qui s'avéra très efficace.

La symphonie enfin achevée fut créée le 6 novembre 1935 au Queen's Hall par l'Orchestre Symphonique de la BBC sous la direction de Harty. Elle fut enregistrée par Decca cinq semaines seulement après. Les impressions de la critique furent mitigées, mais de nos jours, on considère le finale comme un flamboyant point culminant qui apporte une conclusion adéquate au climat d'angoisse des trois premiers mouvements. Certains d'entre nous ont même vu dans cette œuvre la plus grande symphonie composée par un Anglais.

Adrian Boult fut un éternel héraut de William Walton. Les deux hommes ne pouvaient pas venir d'horizons plus opposés : Walton, issu de la classe ouvrière de Lancashire qui fit son chemin jusqu'à l'Université d'Oxford en y entrant comme choriste, et Boult, également originaire du Nord (Chester), mais né dans la haute bourgeoisie.

Mais en sa qualité de directeur musical à la BBC, à l'époque où Walton commençait à être reconnu internationalement, Boult usa de sa grande influence pour initier et organiser plusieurs concerts consacrés à la musique du compositeur.

Il y a une ironie piquante dans le fait que, durant les années 1950, Boult et Walton aient été des rivaux, Boult enregistrant pour Nixa (une branche du label Pye) avec le Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra (un nom de plume pour le London Philharmonic Orchestra), et Walton travaillant pour HMV, avec le prestigieux et récemment reconstitué Philharmonia Orchestra.

Mais Boult l'emporte sur au moins deux points. Son interprétation de la Symphonie est merveilleusement accomplie (un vieil homme inspiré par la musique d'un jeune homme), et met en résonance tous les compositeurs dans la tradition desquels Walton s'inscrivait lui-même. Et son baryton, dans La Fête de Belshazzar, était Dennis Noble qui avait été le soliste lors de la création dirigée par Malcolm Sargent à Leeds, plus de deux décennies auparavant.

Nous repensons à Walton, à Sargent, Previn et à tous ceux qui leur ont brillamment succédé jusqu'à nos jours. Mais celui qui fut toujours présent, discrètement, ce fut Adrian Boult, et ces rééditions rendent un juste tribut à cet humble chef d'orchestre en lui rendant sa place dans le panthéon de Walton.

© 2009 Christopher Morley  
Traduction : Baudime Jam

## BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

[5] *Thus spake Isaiah* (Chorus)

Thus spake Isaiah:

Thy sons that thou shalt beget  
They shall be taken away,  
And be eunuchs

In the palace of the King of Babylon  
Howl ye, howl ye, therefore:  
For the day of the Lord is at hand!

By the waters of Babylon,

By the waters of Babylon  
There we sat down; yea, we wept  
And hanged our harps upon the willows.

For they that wasted us  
Required of us mirth;  
They that carried us away captive  
Required of us a song  
Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song  
In a strange land?

[6] *If I forget thee* (Baritone/Chorus)

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,  
Let my right hand forget her cunning.  
If I do not remember thee,  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.  
Yes, if I prefer not Jerusalem above  
my chief joy.

[7] *By the waters of Babylon* (Chorus)

By the waters of Babylon  
There we sat down; yea, we wept.

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be  
destroyed,  
Happy shall be who taketh thy children  
And dasheth them against a stone,  
For with violence shall that great city  
Babylon be thrown down  
And shall be found no more at all.

[8] *Babylon was a great city* (Baritone/Chorus)

Babylon was a great city,  
Her merchandise was of gold and silver,  
Of precious stones, of pearls, of fine linen,  
Of purple, silk and scarlet,  
All manner vessels of ivory,  
All manner vessels of most precious wood,  
Of brass, iron and marble,  
Cinnamon, odours and ointments,  
Of frankincense, wine and oil,  
Fine flour, wheat and beasts,  
Sheep, horses, chariots, slaves and the  
souls of men.

In Babylon

Belshazzar the King  
Made a great feast,  
Made a feast to a thousand of his lords,  
And drank wine before the thousand.

Belshazzar, whilst he tasted the wine  
Commanded us to bring the gold and  
silver vessels;  
Yea! the golden vessels, which his father  
Nebuchadnezzar,  
Had taken out of the temple that was in  
Jerusalem.

He commanded us to bring the golden vessels  
Of the temple of the house of God,  
That the King, his Princes, his wives  
And his concubines might drink therein.

Then the King commanded us:  
Bring ye the cornet, flute, sackbut, psaltry  
And all kinds of music: they drank wine again  
And then spake the King:

[9] *Praise ye* (Chorus/Baritone)

Praise ye  
The God of Gold  
Praise ye  
the God of Silver  
Praise ye  
The God of Iron  
Praise ye  
The God of Stone  
Praise ye  
The God of Wood  
Praise ye  
the God of Brass

[10] *Thus in Babylon* (Chorus)

Thus in Babylon, the mighty city,  
Belshazzar the King made a great feast,  
Made a feast to a thousand of his lords  
And drank wine before the thousand.

Belshazzar whilst he tasted the wine  
Commanded us to bring the gold and  
silver vessels  
That his Princes, his wives and his concubines  
Might rejoice and drink therein.

After they praised their strange gods,  
the idols and the devils,  
False gods who can neither see nor hear  
Called they for the timbrel and the  
pleasant harp  
To extol the glory of the King.  
Then they pledged the King before  
the people,  
Crying, Thou, O King, art King of Kings:  
O King, live for ever.

[11] *And in that same hour* (Baritone/Chorus)

And in that same hour, as they feasted  
Came forth fingers of a man's hand  
And the King saw  
The part of the hand that wrote.

And this was the writing that was written:  
"MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN"  
"THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE  
AND FOUND WANTING."  
In that night was Belshazzar the King slain  
And his Kingdom divided.

[12] *Then sing aloud* (Chorus)

Then sing aloud to God our strength;  
Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob  
Take a psalm, bring hither the timbrel,  
Blow up the trumpet in the new moon,  
Blow up the trumpet in Zion  
For Babylon is fallen, fallen,  
Alleluia.

Then sing aloud to God our strength  
Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob,  
While the Kings of the Earth lament

And the merchants of the Earth  
Weep, wail and rend the raiment.  
They cry, Alas, Alas, that great city,  
In one hour is her judgment come.

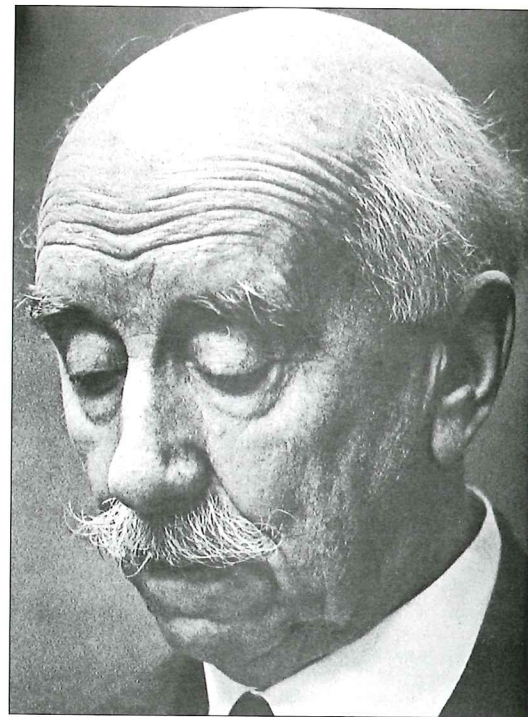
[13] *The trumpeters and pipers* (Chorus)  
The trumpeters and pipers are silent,  
And the harpers have ceased to harp,  
And the light of a candle shall shine no more.

---

[14] *Then sing aloud* (Chorus)  
Then sing aloud to God our strength.  
Make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob.  
Fob Babylon the Great is fallen.  
Alleluia!

Our discs are available worldwide from all good record shops. In case of difficulty and for further information please contact us direct: SOMM Recordings, Sales & Marketing Dept., 13 Riversdale Road, Thames Ditton, Surrey, KT7 0QL, UK.  
Tel: +(0)20-8398 1586. Fax: +(0)20-8339 0981. Email: [sales@somm-recordings.com](mailto:sales@somm-recordings.com)  
Website: <http://www.somm-recordings.com>

**WARNING** Copyright subsists in all Sommm Recordings. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying, rental or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd., 1 Upper James Street, London W1R 3HG



Sir Adrian Boult CH (1889 – 1983)