

DAVID ELLIS

CONCERT MUSIC

orchestral works:

vale royal suite

diversions

concert music

september threnody

celebration

solus

# DAVID ELLIS: CONCERT MUSIC

	<b>Vale Royal Suite *</b>	<b>11.33</b>
1	I A leisurely morning	1.44
2	II Afternoon activity	1.44
3	III Early evening at rest	2.21
4	IV A midnight waltz	2.23
5	V Tomorrow's sunrise	3.21
6	<b>Diversions †</b>	<b>10.37</b>
	<b>Concert Music *</b>	<b>19.06</b>
7	I	6.14
8	II	3.21
9	III	5.54
10	IV	3.37
11	<b>Celebration ~</b>	<b>7.26</b>
	<b>September Threnody †</b>	<b>10.11</b>
12	I	2.24
13	II	2.10
14	III	4.24
15	IV	1.13
16	<b>Solus ††</b>	<b>9.40</b>
	<b>total duration:</b>	<b>69.07</b>

\* Manchester Sinfonia, conducted by Richard Howarth

† Northern Chamber Orchestra, directed by Nicholas Ward

~ RNCM Sinfonia, conducted by Sir Edward Downes

†† Manchester Camerata, conducted by Frank Cliff

# THE MUSIC

In 1957 David Ellis finished 4 years of composition studies with Thomas Pitfield at Manchester's Royal College of Music, leaving with the Royal Philharmonic Prize, the Royal College of Music Patrons' Award, the Theodore Holland Award, the Royal Manchester Institution's Silver Medal, the Ricordi Prize, and a Gulbenkian Award. Among his fellow students were Harrison Birtwistle, John Ogdon, Peter Maxwell Davies, Elgar Howarth, Alexander Goehr, Rodney Friend, and (most importantly) Patricia Cunliffe - soon after to become his wife.

Later in that year Sir John Pritchard, conducting the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, opened their ground-breaking "Musica Viva" series with a new orchestral work by David Ellis. Its anonymous and unflattering title ("Four Pieces for Orchestra") later became the "Sinfonietta", first broadcast in 1961 by the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Maurice Handford, who also was responsible for the premiere of the composer's Violin Concerto, with Martin Milner as soloist, given by the Halle Orchestra in 1962.

The **Concert Music for strings** had already been composed (in 1959) but left on the shelf until its 1972 premiere in a broadcast from Cardiff by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, conducted by Bryden Thomson. There are four movements which, apart from some neo-romantic tensions in the writing for strings, did not conform to the avant-garde tendencies prevalent elsewhere in the UK at the time of its completion.

**Diversions** was a generous 1974 commission from an unlikely source: the Warrington New Town Development Corporation in North-west England. This organisation was set up to ensure that the rapid progress to the M6 motorway's completion did not isolate the town from the benefits of its conveniently placed access points. A concert by Manchester Camerata, conducted by Frank Cliff, to celebrate the success of the

initiative was the result. The work is cast as a set of continuous variations, or diversions, in true classical (and motorway) tradition.

The least problematical work in this collection, in terms of the challenges for all concerned, was composed for a Cheshire-based amateur string orchestra - at the time trained and conducted by Richard Howarth. The **Vale Royal Suite** is a 5-movement 24-hour survey, compressed into 12 minutes of music - a leisurely morning; afternoon activity; early evening at rest; a midnight waltz; and tomorrow's sunrise to finish.

**Celebration** was commissioned by Sir John Manduell for the Royal Northern College of Music, in particular as part of a concert to introduce a 1980s initiative involving an 18th century-sized classical orchestra with post-graduate student players. It was first performed at the inaugural concert conducted by Michel Brandt and later recorded by the BBC conducted by Sir Edward Downes. It is this version which has kindly and generously been made available for inclusion in this collection.

**September Threnody**, for string orchestra, is the most recent in this collection to have been composed - it was completed in 2011 and premiered by the Northern Chamber Orchestra, directed by Nicholas Ward, in 2013. The four sections, although contrasted, each have an underlying contemplative character. It is dedicated to the memory of the composer's wife, who died in 2009.

**Solus** was a commission from Manchester Camerata for performance at their inaugural concert at the RNCM on 2nd June 1973 conducted by Frank Cliff. The recording was made on that occasion. The scoring is for strings and the title is a recognition that, 400 years previously, Copernicus had made the discovery that confirmed the relationship between the Sun and planet Earth. The music is, to all intents and purposes, a set of variations on a theme stated at the outset. Its progress from dawn to dusk reflects not only the life-giving warmth associated with sunlight, but also elements of death and danger.

# THE COMPOSER

David Ellis, born in Liverpool in 1933, was a pupil at the Liverpool Institute before continuing his studies at the Royal Manchester College of Music from 1953-1957, a significant period in British contemporary music - among his fellow students were Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, Elgar Howarth, Alexander Goehr and John Ogdon, who together formed the ground-breaking New Music Manchester Group. It was at this time that his compositions gained recognition, not only through performances, but also in the form of commissions and awards: the Royal Philharmonic Prize, the Royal College of Music Patrons' Award, the Theodore Holland Award, the Royal Manchester Institution Silver Medal, the Ricordi Prize and a Gulbenkian Award.

From 1964 he worked at the BBC as a Music Producer, initially having the responsibility for programme planning and administration of the BBC Philharmonic, and subsequently also for the development of the orchestra's international profile. In 1977 he became Head of Music, BBC North, leaving in 1986 when he was appointed Artistic Director and Composer-in-Residence to the Northern Chamber Orchestra.

In 1994 he moved to Portugal working with the newly-established Orquestra Sinfonica Portuguesa in Lisbon as Assistant to the Director of Music and Chief Conductor, Alvaro Cassuto. He returned to the UK to devote himself exclusively to composition with time set aside for CD production work in a variety of interesting repertoire, both classical and contemporary - the result of his association initially with Naxos and ASC Records, and later with several important independent international labels.

Apart from performances by many organisations in the U.K., his music has been played and broadcast with considerable success in Canada, the U.S.A., Israel, Portugal, Denmark, Brazil, Australia, China, and throughout Europe in more recent years. For more info go to **[www.davidellis-composer.co.uk](http://www.davidellis-composer.co.uk)**

# THE CONDUCTORS

**Sir Edward Downes**, during the years of his association with the BBC Philharmonic as their Chief Conductor was concerned also with the rising generation of musical talent and readily agreed to work with the young orchestral students at the Royal Northern College of Music. The 1981 BBC recording he made with the RNCM Sinfonia is a celebration of his commitment, and is included here with the kind permission of the Principal, RNCM, and the executors of the conductor.

**Richard Howarth** has had a long association with Manchester Camerata as their Concert Master but latterly has developed a growing reputation and enthusiasm as a conductor in the community. He continues as a violinist to contribute to the many chamber music CD projects that emanate within the region. Manchester Sinfonia is his own hand-picked ensemble.

**Frank Cliff** was responsible for the early success of Manchester Camerata when he was invited, by the founder Raphael Gonley on behalf of BBC Radio Manchester, to be their first Principal Conductor. "Solus" was recorded at their inaugural RNCM concert in 1973.

**Nicholas Ward** has shared most of his professional time working in London and Manchester. Initially he joined the Northern Chamber Orchestra as Leader, at the invitation of the founder and conductor Nicholas Smith, but subsequently assumed the post of Music Director, guiding the musicians from the front desk of the violins in true 18th Century style.

# THE RECORDING

**Solus** : Concert Hall, Royal College of Music, Manchester, on 2 June 1973

**Celebration** : BBC Studio 7, Manchester, on 29 June 1981

**Vale Royal Suite** : St. Thomas' Church, Stockport, on 10 January 2009

**Diversions & September Threnody** : St. Thomas' Church, Stockport, on 20 May 2013

**Concert Music** : St. Thomas' Church, Stockport, on 1 August 2013

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**Celebration:** Copyright Control (David Ellis)

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Programme notes: David Ellis

Recording, editing and mastering: Richard Scott, RAS Audio

Producer: David Ellis

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**David Ellis**

photo by Teresa Dietrich