

# The clef of the universes

Alan Frost sings the praises of true amateurs of music.

**T**he National Federation of Music Societies has over 2,350 member societies and according to its website, [www.makingmusic.org.uk](http://www.makingmusic.org.uk), it represents over 138,000 musicians and music-lovers throughout the UK. Collectively, these societies present over 8,000 concerts each year to an audience of 1.5m people. They spend £8.9 million per year on professional artists, just under £1m with music publishers, as well as employing composers, venues, designers, staging suppliers, and instrument manufacturers. 'Making Music' is evidently proud of its brand and I assume that many actuaries are involved with their local organisations and will know how high the standard can be.

As an example, Grange Choral Society performed a concert in Christchurch Priory, Dorset of works by Vaughan Williams. The priory itself is fascinating and there is a virtual tour at [www.christchurchpriory.org](http://www.christchurchpriory.org). Look at the baptistry and you can see Shelley's imposing monument at the west end of the church. The author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley neé Wollstonecraft Godwin, is buried at St Peter's Church in central Bournemouth between her parents and with her husband's heart. Lady Shelley arranged to have a stone column moved in the priory in order that her Sunday view of proceedings was not spoiled from her private pew. From my unimpeded vantage point it was not her husband's poetry I heard but that of the 17th-century poet George Herbert (1593-1633) in Vaughan Williams's 'Five Mystical Songs'. Baritone Jacques Imbrailo has a clear, pleasing baritone and was well served by the chorus, especially in the wordless accompaniment to the close of 'Love bade me welcome' and in the thrilling finale to the words, 'My God and King'.

The main piece (pun unintended) was the Sea Symphony. Dating from 1910 there is much of interest in this vibrant choral work and the style reminds us of another time and place before the First World War. It is a little too long and self-indulgent but full of insight and with a sympathetic setting of Walt Whitman's words. The choral climaxes are moving and there is no doubt of Vaughan Williams's ability as an



Shelley memorial

[www.christchurchpriory.org](http://www.christchurchpriory.org)



Lara Snow Angel

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'orchestrator' for voice. What echoes when the music is over is the transcendental nature of Whitman's poetry itself. 'On the beach at night alone' is only a dozen or so lines but I found myself reading them again and again. My headline this month comes from this: 'As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future.' In the last movement of the symphony the music tries to match the majesty of 'The Explorers' and just fails in my view. This paean to soul searching bears re-reading also. 'Ah who shall soothe these feverish children? Who justify these restless explorations? Who speak the secret of impassive earth?' Whitman's meditation on the infinite and the human spirit are very, very thoughtful.

## Perfect staging

CS Lewis was more anxious in his deliberations, and testier about divine intervention. The production of *Shadowlands* at Salisbury Playhouse maintains the high standard set by artistic director Joanna Read. Julian Glover as Jack and Lisa Eichhorn as Joy Gresham were perfect in this beautiful play by William Nicholson. I had not seen it before and found it more enjoyable than the film with Debra Winger and Anthony Hopkins. It sent me searching for my copy of Lewis's *A Grief Observed*, as there were several echoes of it in the script.

## Tastefully arranged

Leopold Stokowski's arrangements for orchestra deserve the slogan 'never knowingly under-orchestrated', as fans of the film *Fantasia* will know. A fascinating concert by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra with conductor José Serebrier, who worked with Stokowski, included three of the maestro's efforts including Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition'. We are most used to Ravel's version and there is something different about Stokowski's that is most refreshing. There's a delightful moment in 'The Great Gate of Kiev' when cellos and double basses hold the stage.

A rendition of Paganini's fiendish Violin Concerto No 2 'La Clochette' was notable as it was given by the Canadian virtuoso Lara St John, who has captured the glamour end of the classical market. She posed apparently topless for her first album cover, and if you need to know more go to [www.larastjohn.com](http://www.larastjohn.com).