

William Walton

Edith Sitwell

# Façade: An Entertainment

Accompanying booklet to the Mahler  
Players schools tour September 2015

## Introduction

This booklet, which accompanies the Mahler Players' schools tour of Walton's *Façade*, will aim to help students to understand the piece, through study and class discussion before and after the performance. In particular, it will aim to help students and teachers achieve Outcome 1.2 of the Understanding Music Outcomes: identifying and analysing the social and cultural influences which influenced the distinctive sounds and structure of the music. This booklet contains:

- Some general information about the work and the concept
- A short discussion of the link between music and dance
- A factsheet with some information about Walton and his place in history
- An examination of five of the twenty-one numbers that make up *Façade*

## General information and concept

The work consists of recitations of poems by Edith Sitwell with musical accompaniments by William Walton, to be performed by a small chamber ensemble with conductor consisting of flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, cello and percussion. Most of the poems were written in 1918 towards the end of the First World War and the music was composed in the early 1920s. Walton was 20 years old at the time of composition and had recently been sent down from Oxford for repeatedly failing the 'Responsions' exam. Following this he was taken in by the Sitwell siblings – Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell, all of whom were young poets - and lived in room in their home in London. *Façade* was his first major work and it caused a huge stir when first publicly performed on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1923 due to the avant-garde nature of both the music and the poetry. The music is influenced by a wide range of styles from both classical and popular music of the time and earlier, and often openly parodies some of these styles. *Façade* remains unique in Walton's output and the repertory as a whole.

Despite the initial controversy, *Façade* has attained great popularity over time. The sheer 'cheekiness' of the music is one of its most enduring traits. The music was later adapted for a ballet and some of the numbers written out for full orchestra in two Suites by Walton himself.

The concept - un-pitched rhythmical recitation of poetry over a musical accompaniment (which today is more popularly known as rapping) - has its roots in Africa, where stories would be told by 'griots' (West-African story-tellers and musicians) with accompaniment on drums. This later became a feature of some blues music in America which in turn eventually led to Hip-Hop via Funk through the influence of James Brown and others. The concept also evolved separately through the musical-theatre and vaudeville tradition, for example the 'patter-songs' regularly used in Gilbert and Sullivan. Arnold Schoenberg developed a related but different technique called 'Sprechstimme' which he used most famously in *Pierrot Lunaire* and also in his operatic works *Moses und Aron* and *Erwartung*. This technique involves guidelines of the appropriate pitch shape and thus is still closer to singing than the straightforward recitation that is asked for in *Façade*.

## The use of dance-forms in music

As approximately one third of the numbers in *Façade* are explicitly based on dance-forms it makes sense to have a brief general discussion of the link between music and dance across the centuries.

Music and dance are clearly closely related art forms. The idea of dance without music is for the most part absurd and, considered the other way round, dance is often a natural and inevitable outcome of music. It is notable that many African cultures do not have distinct words for music and dance. Although this link is not quite as total in Western music, there is still a very close relationship between the two.

Therefore it is unsurprising that dance forms have had a huge influence on musical forms. Particular dances required particular music to go with them and as significant composers tackled the dances they expanded them and made them musical forms in their own right - no longer simply an accompaniment for dancing. In fact, in many cases the increase in complexity would have made them unsuitable for dancing (as anyone who tried to waltz to Chopin would find out). The list below shows a few examples:

### Renaissance period (c. 1400-1600)

Pavane and Galliard: Two associated dances, the first one slow and in duple time, the second fast and in triple time. Renaissance composers who wrote in these forms include William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons. The Pavane was revived by Fauré and Ravel near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Baroque period (c. 1600-1750)

Suites of dances were very popular and many were written by J.S. Bach for solo keyboard, violin and cello as well as larger ensemble. The basic dances in a Baroque Suite included the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. Examples by Bach include the Partitas, English and French Suites for Keyboard, the Cello Suites, the Partitas for solo violin and the Orchestral Suites

### Classical period (c. 1750-1820)

Composers in this period (the most significant figures are Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven) often included a Minuet as the third movement of their symphonies.

### Romantic period (c. 1820-1900)

Chopin wrote a large number of waltzes, mazurkas and polonaises for solo piano. Tchaikovsky included waltzes in his ballets and operas. Mahler incorporated the German Ländler in place of the Minuet in some of his symphonies. The Strauss family, most famously Johann Strauss II wrote a large number of waltzes and polkas, including the *Blue Danube*. Bizet's *Carmen* includes several dances including the Habanera and Seguidilla.

### Modernism (c. 1900-1930)

Many composers from this time used both old and new dance forms. Examples include Ravel's *La Valse*, the Three Dances in Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale* and Schoenberg's *Suite for Piano*.

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## William Walton – factsheet

Born 1902, Oldham, UK

Died 1983, Ischia, Italy

### Best-known works

Façade (1922)

Portsmouth Point Overture (1925)

Viola Concerto (1929)

Belshazzar's Feast (1931)

Symphony No. 1 (1935)

Crown Imperial (composed for the Coronation of George VI (1936) and also performed at the Coronation of Elizabeth II (1953) and the Royal Wedding in 2011)

Film Scores, including three Laurence Olivier Shakespeare adaptations: *Henry V* (1944), *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1955)

### Timeline of other British composers

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

**William Walton (1902-1983)**

Michael Tippett (1905-1998)

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-)

### Contemporary composers from the rest of the world

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

**William Walton (1902-1983)**

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

### Contemporary historical figures

Alfred Hitchcock, director (1899-1980)

Louis Armstrong, jazz musician (1901-1971)

Walt Disney, businessman and film-maker (1901-1966)

John Steinbeck, author (1902-1968)

**William Walton (1902-1983)**

George Orwell, author (1903-1950)

Count Basie, jazz musician (1904-1984)

## 1. Hornpipe

After a short fanfare, the Hornpipe is the first number in *Façade*.

Like several of the numbers in *Façade*, it is based on a dance form. The Hornpipe is a type of dance popular in Britain from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day. The most famous hornpipe tune is the so-called 'Sailor's Hornpipe', which is played every year during the Last Night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall. It also features as the finale of Mike Oldfield's 'Tubular Bells'.

The most basic features of the hornpipe dance are as follows:

- 4/4 or 2/2 time
- Moderate tempo
- Danced with hard shoes – tapping sound used to help keep rhythm

The Sailor's Hornpipe melody is very simple and Walton uses a number of techniques to add interest:

- Passing of fragments of the tune between instruments
- Composition of countermelodies
- Overlapping music – counterpoint

Getting the right balance between instruments is an important problem to solve in all musical performances, but particularly so when words are being used - the listener must obviously be able to hear the words clearly to understand the performance. For the original performances a 'Sengerphone' (similar to a megaphone) was used to allow the reciter to project over the sound of the instruments. Walton also helps to solve this problem in the way he writes the music – reducing the number of instruments playing and the dynamic marking (or cutting the instruments out altogether) when the reciter has very intricate fast passages.

Other musical concepts used in this number:

- Acciaccaturas, trills, muted and unmuted trumpet
- Octave leaps in the melody
- Staccato playing
- Snare drum rolls
- Trill

## 6. Tango-Pasodoblé

The sixth number in *Façade* is based on two types of dance, European and South-American, but both of which can be said to have a 'Latin' element. It has an ABA structure: the 'A' section is the Tango and the 'B' section the Pasodoblé.

The **Tango** dance originated during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century amongst European immigrants in South America, particularly Argentina and Uruguay. The traditional ensemble for Tango is known as an 'Orquesta típica' and features violins, flute, piano, double bass and bandoneóns (a type of accordion), although there are several examples composed for solo guitar and piano. The most famous tango melody is called *La Cumparsita* 'The Little Parade' composed in 1916 by the Uruguayan composer Rodríguez.

The most basic features of the tango are the following:

- Duple meter (2/4 or 4/4)
- Moderately slow 'lazy' tempo
- The underlying Tango Rhythm:



Tangos were initially associated with the underclass but were popularised in the 1920s by figures such as Carlos Gardel and Astor Piazzolla. They have also been heavily used within the classical tradition by composers such as Stravinsky (*Soldier's Tale*), Albéniz (*España*) and Satie (*Le Tango perpetual*). Walton would almost certainly have been aware of these works. The tango parodies a well-known popular Music Hall song – 'I do like to be beside the seaside'.

The **Pasodoblé** is a lively style of dance originating in Spain and Portugal. Like the tango, it is in duple meter (the literal translation of Pasodoblé is 'double step'). Pasodoblé music is often used during bullfighting.

The most famous example of this type of dance is *Amparito Roca* which was composed in 1925 by the Spanish composer Jaime Texidor. It is informative here to briefly consider the composition history of *Façade*. Although the first performance was in 1922 it was continuously revised over the next few years and numbers were added and taken away. 'Tango-pasodoblé' was not added until 1926 and therefore it is possible that Walton composed it after having heard *Amparito Roca*. There are similarities between the two.

## 16. Valse

The Waltz (French word is 'Valse') is a well-known European dance form that evolved during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and gained great popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. As we have seen, it has been a musical form of great interest to a number of composers – most famously Johann Strauss II and Chopin. The most basic features of the music are as follows:

- Triple time (3/4)
- Harmonies generally changing at most once per bar
- 'Um cha cha' accompaniment - root note of chord played on the first beat and upper notes played on second and third beats
- In performance of a Viennese Waltz, the second beat is often played a little early (this does not apply to the *Façade* Waltz)

This number is typical of many of the movements that make up *Façade*, in that it is simple and complex on different levels. In terms of phrasing it is simple; the whole piece is divided into four and eight-bar phrases. The tunes are also very simple and 'popular'. However, the harmonies are quite advanced and dissonant – for example in the very first bar there is a mixture of C major and C minor (both the note E and the note Eb) and in the second bar there is the use of a 'cluster chord', containing the notes G, Ab and A.

Other concepts used in this number:

- Portamento (glissando) cello
- Hemiola
- Key change
- Chromatic scales
- Unison playing
- Acciacaturas

Influences from a range of sources can be heard in this number, both classical and popular. The glissandi in the cello part and the fast rising and falling scales in the flute and clarinet are very reminiscent of Ravel's *La Valse* – premiered only two years before the composition of *Façade*. The simple regular phrasing is similar to that used in the Waltzes of Johann Strauss II.

The melodies are more influenced by the popular music of the time. The melodies in the Valse could be imagined as part of popular waltzes from this era – listen to 'Three O'Clock in the Morning' by Paul Whiteman as an example.

It is worth pointing out that the normal tempo of this Waltz (and that of *La Valse*, *Blue Danube* etc) is much too fast to dance to. The musical genre has outgrown its dance ancestor and exists independently of it. The dance-like 'feel' is kept but this music would not be used functionally.

## 18. Scotch Rhapsody

This number contains a number of references to Scottish folk music. For example at the point in the poem where the narrator is describing the playing of the bagpipes, the saxophone and then the trumpet imitate the drone of this instrument, with the clarinet playing the melody above. There is also use of the 'Scotch Snap' rhythm in the cello towards the end of the movement. The dotted rhythm prevalent throughout is characteristic of a reel.

The words in this number depict the thoughts of a rather stereotypical Scotsman worrying about observation of the Sabbath and whether or not he will get into heaven.

## 19. Popular Song

The period from the end of the First World War to the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929 is known as the 'Roaring Twenties' and musically as 'the Jazz age'. In America the big names in jazz of this time were Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Paul Whiteman, Louis Armstrong and Cole Porter, with George Gershwin being something of a 'cross-over' artist between jazz and classical. Music in the UK was influenced by what was happening in America, with Jazz, Ragtime, songs from Broadway musicals and Charlestons being the mainstay of popular music of this time. Walton regularly draws from jazz in *Façade*, and this influence is particularly clear in *Popular Song*.

This number, the best-known in *Façade*, is very jazz-orientated. The opening little flourish played by the flute, and then the clarinet an octave lower, establishes this atmosphere with prominent use of the 6<sup>th</sup> degree and flattened 3<sup>rd</sup> degree (minor) of the scale as appoggiaturas. The jazz harmony is then continued in the third and fourth bars, with chords featuring two common jazz *extensions*, the flattened ninth and sharpened eleventh degrees.

Other features of this number include:

- A melody which is clearly intended to be 'swung'
- Glissando



## Questions for class discussion/writing

1. Why did he choose the instruments he did (flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, cello, percussion)?
2. What general trend in the instrumentation used by composers at this time was Walton following?
3. Why does such a small ensemble need a conductor?
4. Does the music reflect the words?
5. Can music be funny in itself? Give examples if so.
6. Why might *Façade* have been controversial at its first performances?
7. Is it still controversial?
8. Did you enjoy the performance of *Façade* and why/why not?