

## **Walton Viola Concerto. Reflections by Sarah-Jane Bradley**

The Walton viola concerto is one of my favourite pieces and has been since I was a student at the RAM in 1988-92! I think I first attempted to learn it 26 years ago! It's such a profound and soulful piece for a young composer to have written. I believe it was written in 1929 so Walton would have been in his late 20s when he wrote it!

The dedication of the work is to Christabel, who was an aristocratic young lady he was in love with. Needless to say, the romance didn't work out, but as with other great works of art it fuelled his inspiration for this work with reams of passion and melancholy.

He actually wrote the piece for the great protagonist of the viola Lionel Tertis, but Tertis did not approve of the major/minor conflict in the tonality (the false relations in the double stopping 6ths which are a recurring feature throughout the work) so declined to give the premiere. This was actually given by Paul Hindemith, and was quickly taken up by Tertis once he recognised the worth of the piece.

When I was initially studying the piece I noticed many similarities to the Prokofiev 1st violin concerto, in terms of the themes, compound time signature of the first movement and central scherzo- it must surely have influenced Walton. However, in its own right it is a masterpiece of lyricism and idiomatic virtuoso writing for both the viola and the orchestra, incorporating long climactic tuttis.

Interestingly in 1962 Walton revised the piece for a slightly smaller orchestra (it's still pretty huge!) but this makes for a better balance and is usually the performance version these days.

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