

**Concert Review:**  
**Guy Nelson Hall, Warwick, (United Kingdom)**  
**October 9, 1999**  
**Première of Guy Woolfenden's *Bassoon Concerto***

**By Graham Hobbs**

*(Readers of The Double Reed will recall the mention of this Concerto in an article by the composer in the previous issue (Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 55-57). The following review first appeared in the Spring 2000 issue of the Double Reed News (p. 39), published by the BDRS, and reprinted here with their kind permission. Ed.)*

Those present at this concert were witness to a special event. Following a spirited performance by the Warwickshire Symphony Orchestra of Tippett's *Suite for the Birthday of Prince Charles*, on strode **Meyrick Alexander** - principal bassoon of the Philharmonia - to begin the serious business of the evening.

In three movements, this *Concerto* opened with a generally light-hearted affair. After a short introduction from the orchestra, Meyrick Alexander's first entry gave the main theme of the movement. Skipping playfully between 7/8 and 6/8 metres, the orchestra sometime found it hard to stay together, but some fireworks from the soloist soon distracted the audience away from any shakiness on the orchestra's part. When the movement opened out into a glorious middle section, however, their accompaniment was superb, providing the ideal support for Meyrick Alexander's lyrical solo lines, before returning to a much more cohesive interpretation of the opening material which brought the movement to a close.

There was a complete change of character for the second movement. It began with a cadenza from the solo bassoon, ambling to begin with, before gathering momentum in the movement proper. Throughout, the mediaeval Englishness which Guy Woolfenden wanted to evoke, came across very well. The main folk-like melody, spiced with 'false relations', was beautifully played by Meyrick Alexander with a

rich lyrical tone, being accompanied by muted strings. However, both he and the orchestra were then able to allude to the sound of a mediaeval band with solo bombarde to great effect! Following an expressive tutti from the orchestra, the quiet coda brought to a close a very enjoyable movement.

The Finale immediately dispelled the relaxed atmosphere of the second movement, and after a dramatic first entry from the soloist, continued with a driving pulse, complete with lots of impressive runs for the solo bassoon. Throughout, Meyrick Alexander made the most of some rich, low writing, particularly in the cadenza. Again, this began haltingly and was played with great dramatic effect, before launching into the last big tutti of the piece. There were still some fireworks to come, with big leaps and runs all brilliantly brought off by the soloist, to ensure a grandstand finish to the work.

Throughout the *Concerto*, I was particularly impressed with the sensitivity of Guy Woolfenden's scoring. The balance between the bassoon and the orchestra was extremely well judged, allowing Meyrick Alexander to bring out all the character of the piece. It is a pleasant and approachable piece to listen to and one for which I believe bassoonists will be grateful.

After the interval, we saw the return of Meyrick Alexander for a performance of Elgar's *Romance for Bassoon and Orchestra*. This is a piece requiring both the soloist and orchestra to be absolutely as one in their rubato. Although this was not always the case, it was still a thoroughly enjoyable performance. Meyrick Alexander's long, soaring phrases were matched by the orchestra's passionate recapitulation of the main theme. The concert concluded with Malcolm Arnold's *Symphony No. 5*. ❖