

The Previously Unexplored Correspondence
of
Robin Milford (1903-1959)

1925

No. 1; Date: January 10th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
You will be glad to hear that Dr Whittaker has accepted the “Fiddler of Dooney”. Of course he has not taken the third one as the words are unsuitable for schools, which was a foregone conclusion. All the same I think the words <u>are</u> quite healthy & suitable for boy’s schools. As to the “Countryman”, he says:- “The Countryman would not go in schools at all. The style is such that it would prejudice teachers against it. The accompaniment is not easy, & it is difficult to get the hang of it the first try through, which, of course, means a great deal in the popularity of a song. I think we would not be well advised to issue it”. ... I am making a slight alteration in the two chords in the “Moor”;¹ otherwise it is to remain the same. I am also sending up my opera. Barker and I enjoyed the Goss-Foss Concert <u>immensely</u>, though he grumbled most of the way up at having to go. Our chief (& really only) criticism was that we should have liked a few more serious songs, so many of them being humorous. However of course it was called a concert of “Sociable Songs”, & meant to be light & “Saturday -nightish”.	Dr William Whittaker (1876 – 1944), was the famous music publisher. ‘The Fiddler of Dooney’ is a 1925 solo song setting of the famous Yeats poem by Yeats. ‘The Moor’ is a setting of a poem by Ralph Hodgson for solo voice and piano. This is the opera entitled ‘Vertue’, consisting of a prologue, two acts and an epilogue. It was completed in 1927. John Goss was a famous singer of the period, while Hubert Foss the well-known OUP publisher.

I do wish you had been there; he is really marvellous I think, & I have hardly ever, if ever, had such thrills of pleasure at any concert as I had then. I would like to tell you all about the concert, but it would be so dull for you, not having been there. However, there was a beautiful setting of an old French tune by Foss, exquisitely played & sung; also a very beautiful folk song arrangement by Moeran. I should very much like you to have heard a very weird setting of Foss to Hardy's "Friends Beyond". I like the poem very much; the music certainly got atmosphere, but it was too difficult for me, anyhow at a first hearing. As for the singing of the "Keeper", I nearly jumped out of my seat with joy. One of the Westminster Singers (the man, who wrote the "Plank" in Part 1) sang "Jacky-boy"'s part & put a lovely Dorset accent into it. The Sergeant's Song by Foss was first-rate, I thought. Before I stop boring you about the concert I must tell you one more thing. When Goss had sung "The Plank", everyone shouted for an encore, so Goss (who was by then very tired I should think) made the composer sing it, while he took his place behind. But though he was the composer he could not in the least hold the audience as Goss had done. ... I have written a "Ballet to Four Voices" (as they used to be called) for Mr Morris, to whom I go tomorrow at 11.40. ... I saw Mrs Frederick this morning & I am going to know by Saturday, whether I am to go to this school this term or not. ... We had a very jolly rehearsal with Dr Vaughan Williams yesterday, except that Murry Morris would bawl all the parts in my ear, & was generally officious to Dr Vaughan Williams, etc as usual.

This section of the letter goes on to provide some real musical detail of the musicianship of John Goss (as a singer) and Hubert Foss (here, as a composer).

This is a very interesting comment by Milford, considering his more developed style of the 1940s and 1950s.

This comment shows Milford as peripatetic piano teacher at this point. It was a precarious occupation and one which caused Milford a lot of stress.

No. 2; Date: March 30th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: John Goss, The Grand Hotel, Leicester.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
Dear Miss Newsom, Could you possibly make it 2pm on Wednesday? Sorry to be such a nuisance, but 3.30 is the only time I can manage for a rehearsal of my concert that evening. If you cannot manage this, don't bother to reply, but turn up as much before 3pm as you can.	Kirstie Newsom. Milford's fiancée, was a singer with a fine voice, premiering many Milford songs. This is evidence that Kirstie sang seriously and with other eminent professional singers. John Goss was one of the most prominent singers of his day. Milford dedicated 'I Will Not Let Thee Go' to him.

No. 3; Date: May 21st, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I can't go to the show as I have been invited to go to Mr Balfour Gardiner's for that Tuesday & Wednesday. Martha & Daddy are very keen for me to go, so I am cutting my lesson with Mr Holst that day. Frederick Austin's son ... is going to be there & with him a friend, also from the College, named Taylor, whom I think is a good composer & is quite a nice youth ... we are going to play tennis & Mr Balfour Gardiner is wonderful playing tennis ; I think he gets more excited over it even than Barker (I don't mean Barker is playing us, but Barker is one of his great matches). I have at last written the article on Howell's Psalm Preludes, which I have meant to do for so long ... I am thinking of sending it to the Musical Times, signed 'Peter Tavy', as it would not quite do for a student at the College openly to criticise a professor at the same College in a public paper, if they should happen to accept it. You said in your lovely long letter today that it will be hard to trace the places down in the Hardy country, but in the introduction to "Tess" there is a hint of the places with both their fictitious & real names.	Balfour Gardiner, the composer, was a generous benefactor to numerous young composers, including Milford. He bought Milford his first car and was godfather to Milford's son Barnaby. One wonders what Holst had to say about Milford missing his lesson! This emphasises the fact that Balfour Gardiner was very keen on tennis, in addition to music. Milford, of course, also an organist seems not to have approved of Howells' musical language. This is even more remarkable given Milford's European developmental style in later life! The Hardy reference show Milford's dedication to the poet, as exemplified in the songs from the 1930s onwards.

No. 4; Date: May 28th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I have hardly stopped working all day ... I have at least written a new round for the "Shoemaker", which I really think is quite jolly. It was a frightful sweat & took me about 3 hours solid work. It is with piano accompaniment, so if you can imagine trying to make each piano chord fit 3 notes, & at the same time, making the 3 times 3 decent separate tunes, you can imagine a bit what a job it was. It looks as if I shall be quite gay in the next month. Already I am going to Mr Balfour Gardiner, John (from June 8th – 10th), Dr Ley (19th – 21st), perhaps you, possibly the dean of Canterbury for next Friday night, & the Gibbons Centenary Festival. He knows Martha & Daddy & is said to be a charming old man (I don't know if he is old but one always imagines Deans as old). Do you mind sending back Mr Ropper's criticism some time, as I may want it? Now I am happy writing to you, Sweet, but the evening is coming on, & it is then that I get so 'low'. O Darling Treasurer I do so long to be married to have you always with me & to share your whole life with you, Treasure, & to feel the Calm & beauty of your presence all around me.	'The Shoemaker' is Milford's opera for children written in 1923. A remarkable work for so young a composer, comprising choruses, soli, duets, rounds This section shows not only Milford's social connections but also the breadth of his musical calendar. This final paragraph shows that, even as early as 1925 (before his marriage) Milford was suffering from fear and anguish, how much he depended on Kirstie and realised the importance of his marriage to Kirstie for mental safety.

No. 5; Date: June 6th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I have just come in from my concert. I liked Mr Morris's work much the best; a delightful Motet for String Orchestra, in the Elizabethan style, & very contrapuntal; also beautifully written for strings. Van Dieran's Quartet did not impress me as it should have done, I'm afraid; very wooden in harmony, with curious lapses into diatonic harmony, & with a curious contrast of style in the last movement, a quite jolly, ? vulgar, diatonic tune being given out at the beginning & developed fairly normally. Of course these are only first impressions, but certainly was not fearfully struck. A very poor quartet by Arthur Benjamin was also played, at least I thought it was appallingly dull & common-place, but I admit that I was getting hotter & less able to take things in by then. I was very glad to hear little Mr. Goss singing again, but I'm afraid I didn't care for "The Curlow", at least I started off by enjoying it, I then think 'this is quite pleasant but I wish there were a little more rhythmic life & "harmonic stability" & I then think "oh dear I am getting so bored". However I admit that it suits the words admirably & I'm sure that it <u>is</u> a work of art, only it is a branch of art, which I am really unable to appreciate, as I was unable to appreciate Part II of "The Mass of Life". This all sounds as if I didn't enjoy the Concert, but you see I can be interested in music, even if I don't enjoy a lot of it; & anyhow I did enjoy Morris's Motet. I hope you haven't been bored by this rather detailed description of the Concert ... I expect there will be a bad storm tonight it is so hot & rather heavy. It will be curious if there is as June 6th 1923 was when we had that very bad one, which first really upset me about them. I hardly ever look at the glass or weather	The contrapuntal aspect would be quite appropriate for R O Morris as counterpoint was very much his expertise. 'The Curlow' is the famous song by Peter Warlock, while Mr Goss was John Goss (10 May 1894 – 13 February 1953), a baritone recital singer and teacher. He was a key figure in 1920s English musical life, befriending composers such as Rebecca Clarke, Frederick Delius, Bernard van Dieren, E J Moeran and Peter Warlock. Milford continues to show his concerns over thunderstorms and their effects on him.

reports now, & try to put the storms out of my mind, when I can.	
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No. 6; Date: June 7th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I would like you to have seen the gathering at the concert yesterday. It was not very large, but all the Bohemians & young Aesthetics & Know-alls seemed to be there & the old ones too. It was funny to notice how Vaughan Williams, Holst and Morris were all dressed like ordinary civilians, whereas Warlock had a wonderful pair of bright brown Oxford bags, shoes & socks to match, & a black turn-down hat, & there were many other strange looking birds there with long hair & black hats. By the way the turn-down hat is a Bohemian custom – however I have been very good & haircut to wear it turned down used you tell me to; indeed I have got really quite used to it now. All the same I have my point that it <u>is</u> the cult of the young aesthete!! I am having a great struggle with my Double Fugue. Mr Holst seems really keen about it & anxious for me to get it really good. It is too short at present, He said that it was the natural reaction against Wagner etc now-a-days to make things too abrupt. He had done it himself. He likes it up to a point, but says that it can be carried too far, when it is like walking out of the room in the middle of a sentence. I am off to old John by the 2- something train tomorrow & arrive back, via Mr Drew with my new piano pieces, & Mr Foss with “The Shoemaker”, on Wednesday at about 6 o'clock.	The comments on dress-codes shows the difference between the ‘traditional’ circle and the more ‘Bohemian’ figures of Warlock’s set.

No. 7; Date: June 13th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I have been working at my Double Fugue this morning. Mr Holst is very keen for me to get it still better. He said I had done a very good week's work on it last week. He is so keen, which makes one's lessons so interesting. He told me he was very glad I didn't have a musical success about two years ago, as he thinks that would have spoilt my music, because everyone would have gone on wanting me to repeat myself, & so I should not have got any further. He said that one of his philosophical rules (or rather warnings) was that "success was the only thing which man has never learnt to conquer". Certainly the best people in music now-a-days seem to have no success till middle age. I think it is necessary for me to try to publish a few things now, so that I can have a small name on which to teach. But once I have got enough money & a secure position for us to feel fairly safe about, I do not think I shall want to publish much – I am sure one ought to try to keep a very high standard for what one thinks is worth giving to the world. But I do try to do that now as well, only as I get on hope to be able to turn more attention to the bigger forms of music, which, as far as money & publication go, are of little use, unless one has a really big name. Your letters to me today were very sweet, but rather stern! And I am a little hurt that you should sign yourself "independent". I have tried to be a bit better about the thunder, Sweet, at least I have hardly ever looked at the glass or the paper, if that is being better, & I haven't talked about it so much. But I really cannot tell how much my evening depressions are my loneliness for want of you (here there follows heavy scribbling out) & how much this fear of thunder - though of course I know that it	This shows how well Milford respects his composition teacher (Gustav Holst) and the lessons. Here, Milford shows a knowledge of Holst's philosophical leanings and respects them. Milford expresses Holst's advice on publication and his own ideals in this area. Very unusually, Milford now discusses his hurt with Kirstie at her tone and moves on to consider (and admit to) his depressions, his fear of thunder, and his loneliness without Kirstie.

is a great deal the former, but then you know how all my nervous get mixed up together & I get so nervous & depressed & muddled that I really do not (know) what <u>is</u> the matter with me. And then finally your news made me burst out in those horrid gloomy letters. However, one thing I do know is that I have a great emptiness inside me for want of you, my Angel; there is an old saying, I believe, "absence makes the heart grow fonder", & I do think it is true, don't you, Treasure? But I do not feel I wish to repeat the experiment in the future ... I <u>do</u> hope I shall not make you too depressed by my nerves ... I know you will be such a help to me in all things ...	
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No. 8; Date: July 2nd, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I had a very interesting lesson on scoring with Mr. Holst. He said that he was a rotten conductor & would never conduct at all, only that the orchestral players always did their best for him because he had played with them (he played the trombone) in orchestras & they knew that he knew about the instruments. (he is rather precise in speech, & always says "instruments" sounding the "ment" fully, like in "meant").	

No. 9; Date: July 4th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I <u>do</u> hope you will enjoy your draper's job, & if you don't, <u>please</u> stop it, & ask me for the money; my royalties will be in soon, so I shall have plenty. I spent the morning sweating away at the end of my 'Double Fugue' till I was nearly dead. It is extraordinarily hard to go on altering & altering a thing when you have already worked on it a lot & altered a great deal already. I do hope you will not find me very disappointed when we are married. I am afraid I am very narrow (metaphysically); I concentrate on a very few things & I am afraid this may bore you; I do hope you will not find yourself wanting your friends & yet to want to ask them to come or go to them for fear of hurting my feelings; & so feeling your life cramped & dull. I do like myself at all at present; if only I was less nervous, perhaps I could make an effort to be less selfish & ? & jealous, but my 'nerves' continually turn my thoughts in upon myself, which is of course hopeless for any development of character; I think it is rather hard that I should be made to suffer so much from nerves. Anyhow I do hope I shall become nicer soon, for I should hate you to find out that other people's natures were pleasanter to you than mine – and there again, you see, my first thoughts are always of myself. Oh I do get sick of myself sometimes, though I don't suppose you believe it.	This shows Milford tender care for Kirstie. This comes after a discussion of a thunderstorm and Milford's confession that he was relieved not to have heard the thunder. It shows Milford's realisation of his sensitive temperament and concerns for his future marriage; this is indicative of the composer and sadly, neurotically developed (in terms of self- doubt, inferiority, self-criticism and nerves) over the years ahead. .

No. 10; Date: July 9th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I had a very nice letter from Dr Whittaker with suggestions about “The Shoemaker”, in which this occurs: “<u>Milford Opera</u>. This is a charming work, miles ahead of the usual thing. I wish it luck”. He, at Mr Foss’s suggestion, wants to take certain numbers to be published in the Oxford Choral Songs (“The Gipsy Girl” edition – you know), so that the one version will draw attention to the other, & vice versa. So that is rather nice, isn’t it? I hope it will be out by October, in which case they may be going to do it at Down next term (Anne Farrar suggested it), & also Aunt D says she will do it at Sherbourne. Also I may do it here. I have been telling Mr Foss about it today; I like him very much. By the way Daddy is taking his songs. He was quite enthusiastic about my “Shoemaker”. I was very miserable last night. I had worked too hard during the day & I had a great many things to do with my music on my mind.	Hubert Foss was the first Musical Editor (1923–1941) for the <i>Oxford University Press (OUP)</i>. This is in relation to a family performance of “The Shoemaker”.

No. 11; Date: July 20th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
... I <u>do</u> wish you could come up here now & start your holiday with me; it is all because I am too stupid & cowardly to be able to earn money for you, so you have to go & slave away for yourself. But I <u>will</u> release you from it soon. Darling, the examiners seemed to think I was getting on today & I do not see why I shouldn't get a teaching job of sorts from Sir Hugh (RCM Director) at about September 1926, & if I get that & some private pupils (whom I mean to advertise for anyhow soon) I don't see why we shouldn't get married in 1927 ... I am at present going in for a £5 prize for composing with 2 unison songs or 2 two-part songs for a composition given by a music publishing firm. I had to play my Double Fugue* at my composition exam today. I didn't play it well, but they were quite nice friendly old birds & I had to play them my 'Pastoral' from your Suite** also, which I think they liked. It was Dr Wood (Charles Wood) who said I had more power of developing a theme than I had ... I also did a Counterpoint – Harmony exam; they never give one enough time for these, but I am slow. I had a jolly time at Headly yesterday, & played two sets, playing quite well for me, & had a gorgeous tea with cucumber sandwiches & a strawberry-cream-cake ...	

No. 12; Date: July 21st, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

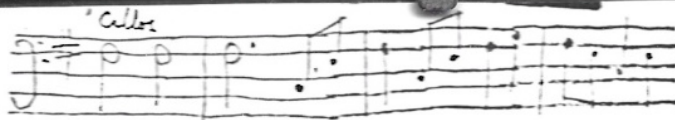
Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
My Own Beautiful Peep, I have just banked another £7, giving me £93 in the bank now, exclusive of about £50 in our (& other) savings. I had my last lesson with Miss Ford this morning. I told her about next text term & she thought I was very wise to concentrate on my ARCM work. I played her my Double Fugue & she seemed very keen, & specifically liked the first subject. I think of my bigger things it is the best I have done (though of course I have done so few “bigger” things so far & am I am very keen to get it scored & finished up. I wish Mr Holst could have seen the end. Will you think it very horrid of me if I try to do 3 hours work till we go to the Land’s End ... You see I have <u>so</u> much to fit in with , I am <u>so</u> keen to get this ARCM, which I feel will be a real step to getting a job & hence getting married	This is one of the first endearing addressing of Kirstie as ‘Peep’; many the compositions are dedicated to her in this manner. It also shows Milford’s concern at having enough money to marry Kirstie, and as quickly as possible. Could this be Norah Ford, with whom Milford later became very friendly and dedicated his <i>Sonata in D</i>, Op 77? The Double Fugue was awarded and premiered at the RCM on December 26th, 1926. Please see the details below. Milford did, of course, gone on to write large-scaled works, including two symphonies, a ballet, an opera, and various orchestral works. It is sad that Holst did not, in fact, see or hear the finished work at the RCM.

No. 13; Date: July 29th, 1925; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
I have just popped another £11 into the Bank & have now got £104 there – “pretty keen work” ...	This show the importance of finance in the Milford/Newsom engagement in terms of their anxiety to be married. Other discussions in this letter, although not quoted, show Milford’s continued tennis playing, in addition to cricket.

No. 14; Date: Unknown; Addressee: Kirstie; Sent From: Epsom.

Pertinent Musical/Social/Personal Aspects	Comments
My Own Loveliest Peep, You will be glad to hear that Mr Foss & Mr Greaves both like my 'Pied Piper' very much, & the former told Frosty that he though my composition was I used to do. Which is rather encouraging coming from the brilliant & up-to-date Hubert! I am sending you the first copy of 'Rutterkin'. It looks quite jolly I think. 'Parson Hogg' should follow soon. Dick asked Mr Turberville, a friend of his who has just gone as a senior classics master to Epsom College, to dinner here last night. He seemed very nice, shy little man. After dinner Dick was keen to try through 'Rutterkin' as there were 3 male voices (not counting Frank), so we all went upstairs & made an awful row bawling it. I also had to play my piano pieces (which I played a little better than the abominable way I have been playing lately), & Dick played ...	Sometime in 1925, before the publication of 'Pied Piper' and after the publication of 'Rutterkin'. Also, obviously after a number of Milford's compositions were written, published and performed. 'Peep', was Robin's pet-name for his wife. This incomplete note was hand-delivered. Hubert Foss, the prominent, formidable and influential music editor at the OUP. Sadly, the remainder of this letter is missing.



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THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC.

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ORCHESTRAL REHEARSAL

CONDUCTORS—

MR. ADRIAN C. BOULT AND THE COMPOSERS

FRIDAY, 10th DECEMBER, 1926, at 10 a.m.

FOR COMPOSERS

The following works will be rehearsed :

1. Ballet : "The Tragedy of Daft Meg"... FREDERIC WESTCOTT
(Royal College of Music)
2. Double Fugue ROBIN MILFORD
(Royal College of Music)
3. Elegy for Flute, Horn and String Orchestra } ELIZABETH MACONCHY
Fantasy for Flute, Harp and String Orchestra } (Royal College of Music)
4. "In Pastures Green" MARJORY HARRISON
(Royal College of Music)
5. Rhapsody for Orchestra DAVID EVANS
(Royal College of Music)

From 10 a.m. till about 11-45 a.m. will be devoted to rehearsing
and afterwards the Works will be played straight through.

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