

# RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS SOCIETY JOURNAL

WIDENING THE KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THE MUSIC OF RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

ISSUE NO 95 FEBRUARY 2026

*S<sup>r</sup> Edw. Cress.*



*Eratis  
M. 1607  
M. 1607*

**A 99 years celebration of the international Pipers' Guilds**

Flanders Recorder Duo and Bamboo Friends

**DUTCH PIPERS' GUILD – UPC 026798200282**

In 1933 Vaughan Williams was elected the president of the English Pipers' Guild, later the Pipers' Guild of Great Britain. The Guild had been formed the year before by schoolteacher Margaret James who saw in a Sicilian *friscalettu* – a goatherd's handmade pipe – a simple tool to help her teach the basics of music and the craft of instrument making. First in London and then in the village of Sapperton in the Cotswolds, a center of late flowering in the Arts and Crafts movement, her methods quickly attracted a devoted following in and beyond the classroom. Seeing an opportunity to reach a wider audience, James formed the English Pipers' Guild. The first president was A.H. Fox Strangways, musicologist, music critic and founder of the journal *Music and Letters*. He retired after a year, pleading age but James quickly found in Vaughan Williams another believer in her cause. "Nothing can give us greater confidence in the future than to know that he is on our side, to be consulted on all occasions," the announcement stated.



The composer, deeply committed to British folk music, folk dance and amateur pageants, embraced this new opportunity to encourage greater lay musical engagement. He reportedly never made a pipe for himself but enthusiastically supported the Guild with his name and presence for the next 16 years. He ended his tenure encouraging Julian Herbage, one of the co-editors of a weekly BBC program, *Music Magazine*, to feature it on a broadcast after earlier interest in the Guild at the BBC had waned. "It seems to me," he wrote in 1949, "they are doing splendid work in teaching the elements of musical performance and instrument construction to children; also making them acquainted with delightful tunes in a delightful manner." That Home Service broadcast took place on January 8, 1950.

Best of all, Vaughan Williams composed at least five works for the Guild. Two of them became signature works of the Guild: a 1933 *Suite for Two Pipes* and a 1939 *Suite for Pipes* for a quartet. They are thoroughly charming and beautifully formed to the limitations and maximum capabilities of these simple instruments. The five short but challenging movements of the *Suite for Two Pipes*, a little over seven minutes of music, include a striking array of forms with simple and complex contrapuntal writing throughout and, of course, a pastoral. The *Suite for [Four] Pipes* is nearly as compact and demanding, with a fanfare-like *Intrada* and three clever dance movements: a minuet, a waltz and a lively jig. Held in the Guild's archives for many years, a third piece in difficult-to-decipher notation has recently been edited and published by the Flanders Recorder Duo. This is the composer's 1939 arrangement for pipe quartet and piano of three movements from his 1936 *Suite for Viola and Piano*. A *Canzona* for pipe trio, likely from the same time, is nearing publication. Finally, there is a simple folk-like song for treble voice and pipe, *The Willow Whistle*, to words by M.E. Fuller. It is unpublished but twice recorded from the manuscript.

All four of the works for bamboo pipe ensembles can be heard in this new release sponsored by the Dutch Pipers' Guild, a sister organization of the British guild. The program is anchored by the Flanders Recorder Duo: Tom Beets and Joris van Goethem. The Duo began this project in its 2021 release *FR2* on the Aeolus label with a recording of the *Suite for Two*

*Pipes* on their own bamboo instruments. Since it would be hard to improve upon, it has been reissued on this new disc. In 2006, van Goethem, as a member of the now disbanded Flanders Recorder Quartet, made a fine recording, also on Aeolus, of the *Suite for [Four] Pipes* on Renaissance recorders. This new recording, by the Duo with virtuoso recorder players Pieter Campo and Bert Honig, becomes the first on bamboo pipes in a digital format. Two earlier recordings, by the Pipers' Guild Quartet in 1946 (Columbia 78s) and the English Pipe Quartet in 1969 (Apollo Sound LP), have not been commercially reissued. The recorders are lovely – there is a published version for them, as well – but the warm ethereality of these bamboo pipes is an immediate pleasure.

The other two pieces are receiving premiere recordings. *Carol, Musette and Christmas Dance (Viola Suite for Four Pipes and Piano)* is in fact a delightful transformation of parts of the *Suite for Viola and Piano*, itself more than just a piano reduction from the suite with orchestra. The composer chose these three out of the eight movements that lent themselves to the diatonic scale of the instruments. Playing chromatic notes involves advanced techniques and Vaughan Williams, following James' request, avoided them. Instead of assigning one soloist and an accompaniment, the five artists are given parts that move from solo to accompaniment and back as range and tuning of the instruments dictate, all while maintaining a seamless flow to the enchanting music. It is ingenious and beautifully realized here by the Duo with Guild pipers Rose Atkinson, Brigit de Klerk and pianist Josje Lodder. Finally, the diminutive *Canzona* is likely from an otherwise lost suite or was intended for one that was never completed. Its technical demands are relatively few but it is performed by the Duo and Rose Atkinson with obvious affection.

The remainder of the program consists of an eclectic selection of works. There is a stylishly played transcription, for four low pipes, of the *Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 555*, a work once attributed to J.S. Bach. There is a sparkling suite in G major for the Duo adapted from three movements – 10, 29 and 5 – of the 36 *Fantaisies for Harpsichord, TWV 33* by Georg Philipp Telemann and a quirky and lighthearted *Quartet V* by Henk Badings, who composed twelve of them for the Dutch Pipers' Guild. There are three shorter works: two medieval dances played by the Duo and a contemporary piece by Belgian composer Stijn Kuppens. In this last, Kuppens reimagines a medieval chanson, *Ou beau chastel*, an ancient work when it was included in the 15th century *Leuven Chansonnier*. The composer plays cello and subtle electronics to Tom Beets' tenor pipe in a hauntingly modern reflection on the song.

The program notes by Beets and van Goethem, which aptly describe Vaughan Williams' compositions as "a pinnacle of art music for bamboo pipes", introduce the music, performers and instruments. There are a few factual errors in the section on Vaughan Williams' music but this in no way diminishes the value of this marvellous album. It was obviously a labor of love, imaginatively and thoughtfully assembled. It is played by gifted artists on instruments expertly made so that tuning is impressively true and tone exquisitely sweet. The CD, titled *A 99 years celebration of the international Pipers' Guilds*, can be purchased from the Flanders Recorder Duo's website, [shop.flanders-recorder-quartet.be/](http://shop.flanders-recorder-quartet.be/) and streamed from many standard services.