

JOHN VEALE

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Although born in 1922, John Veale has only a dozen or so concert works to his name and this is largely due to his having stopped composing twice - in 1956 for a period of about seven years, apart from some 'B' feature film scores, and for fourteen years between 1966 and 1980.

His music is tonal and, being immediately likeable, it presents no problems to the listening public. The works of his first period - that is up to 1956 - have a guileless simplicity and attractiveness which, despite their being devoid of anything profound, certainly impressed such conductors as Barbirolli, Boult, Weldon, Sargent, Groves and Schwarz. Yet the immediacy does not render the music banal; it might be restricted in its range due to the lack of tension that would evolve from a more ingenious development of the musical argument. Some works, such as the Clarinet Concerto of 1953 are monothematic and it is just possible that some may find this wearisome although the comparative brevity of the works of this period should prevent this. Veale's sound world can be lush and often very visual which may subconsciously reflect his involvement with composing film scores; yet this lushness is not Hollywoodish but decidedly English, showing an indebtedness to the mystic and modal styles of Vaughan Williams as magnificently displayed in such superlative works as his *Flos Campi*, *Dives and Lazarus* and the *Tallis Fantasia*. Veale's music has a nostalgia both aurally and visually. Fortunately, it is free from the nauseating kind of self-pity which pervades the works of Parry and Elgar. The visual impact of his music is very important; it conjures up the rural England of yesteryear before the advent of motorways and overcrowding; although the music cannot be regulated merely to anachronism, it does encapsulate England's green and pleasant land, thus giving it a quality that is both heart-warming and therapeutic. When we come to the final work of his first period, *Kubla Khan*, the English feel, while still there, gives way to an exotic quality depicting the East as demanded by the text. There may be moments in the *Symphony no 1* which suggests the "wide-open spaces" style of the American composer, Roy Harris, with whom Veale studied. All his works are very open-hearted and uncomplicated, the music is simple in design (music students would have no difficulty in any chord analysis) following the facile method of diatonic devices. It is music on the surface yet not superficial and which, occasionally, has a beguiling and seductive quality which music of a greater tension possibly might not achieve. John Veale's works are distinctive as they bear the hallmarks of a personal voice; his music is easily recognisable indicating not only a consistent style but a composer who is confident in the idiom he has chosen.

The second period of his creativity includes the *Violin Concerto* completed in 1984 and first performed in a broadcast with Erich Gruenberg and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra in 1986. Here, a more expansive style appears and the music is more profound - the central "lament" is telling. This is probably explained by the fact that the work is autobiographical and anger was part of its inspiration. The works of this second phase retain tonality and immediacy and could only have been written by John Veale. His admirable consistency prevails and nowhere better is this shown than by comparing the *Clarinet Concerto* of thirty years earlier with the *Violin Concerto*. The earlier concerto is in one movement and is structurally the same as the large opening movement of the later concerto.

John Veale was born on 15 June 1922 at Shortlands, near Bromley in Kent. His father, Douglas, was a civil servant for twelve years until 1930 when he became registrar of Oxford University, a position he held for twenty-seven years. John Veale's mother's maiden name was Henderson. John's paternal grandmother's maiden name was Rootham and she was distantly related to Cyril Rootham.

As a child, John was responsive to music. By the age of five he was haunted by the *Faery Song* from Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*. However, his real awakening to music came in 1934 when he acquired a clarinet and sought to teach himself to play it from the tutor written by Frederick Thurston. Later, he did receive some practical help from a maths master and general encouragement in music from the English



composer, John Gardner, who was director of music at Repton School in 1939-40. John Veale was a pupil there for four years from 1936 where he particularly enjoyed the classics and retained admiration for Jane Austen, George Elliot, Thomas Hardy and the Brontes as well as modern novelists. He singled out such works as Emma, Middlemarch and Jude the Obscure as outstanding examples of his personal choice. His musical taste is also catholic. He regarded Mozart as the perfect exemplar of freedom of spirit within formal structures; he had a vast regard for Bach but, like many, found it difficult to respond to his genius; he identified very strongly with Beethoven and the master's obsession with form, his tormented spirit making him a very "human" composer whose sublime art is almost mesmeric. Veale had a "love-hate" relationship with Wagner's "overwhelming" music explaining that when he hears Wagner's music he finds his heart contradicting his head.

It was in modern history that Veale achieved his Bachelor of Arts degree at Oxford in 1943 but, by this time, he had decided upon a musical career. He had discovered Sibelius and Shostakovich around 1938 and a year later, had been profoundly impressed by Walton's Symphony no 1. He was also deeply affected by the works of Bartok, Ravel, Vaughan Williams, Alan Rawsthorne, Samuel Barber, Bax and Roy Harris. The outcome of these emotional responses, coupled with his inner drive, determined his destiny. As with many young composers, he encountered opposition from his parents. To complicate matters his relationship with his father was never easy and he sometimes felt his mother to be remote. What encouragements there were came from professional musicians such as Sir Hugh Allen who was professor of music at Oxford from 1918 until his death in 1946. Walton was also a marvellous help which was indicative of his character. He may have recognised in the young man the strong self-criticism which was an abiding feature of his own life. John Veale wrote slowly, revised extensively and "agonised over getting things right". His first attempts at composition were in 1937 and were mostly orchestral. They have long since been discarded.

During the war, Veale was in the Education Corps and eventually reached the rank of sergeant. He was stationed in turn at Winchester, York, Wrotham, London and Salisbury and, during these years, met Bryan Balkwill, Christopher Hassall, Eric Fenby and William Pleeth.

On 26 August 1944 Veale married Diana Taylor in Oxford. She had studied at the Slade School of Art which had been evacuated from London to Oxford during the war. Being an artist, she designed the sets for the Oxford Repertory Company.

It was in 1946 that the first work of John Veale was performed. This was an amateur production of his Symphonic Study. The score had been shown to Sir Hugh Allen by an Oxford organist, Basil Thewlis. Allen asked Veale for permission to show the score to Walton which resulted in a public performance by the Oxford Orchestral Society, conducted by Sir Thomas Armstrong. In 1947, enabled by a Government grant to study music at Oxford, Veale went to Egon Wellesz, although he had some "unofficial" lessons from him during the war. Wellesz had come to England in 1938 from his native Austria, joining the faculty of music at Oxford University. Veale liked Wellesz but they were not in sympathy musically. At that time, Wellesz was steeped in Mahler; Veale was devoted to Sibelius, of whom Wellesz was contemptuous saying, for example, that the Symphony no 6 of Sibelius was "not really a symphony at all - just a sketch for one!" Despite this aesthetic gulf between master and pupil, Veale learned much of the subtleties of harmony and had to prepare exercises with great care for discussions at lessons.

In 1947, John Veale wrote incidental music for the Oxford University Dramatic Society's production of Love's Labour Lost, produced by Anthony Besch, with a cast that included Ken Tynan and Lindsay Anderson. He also wrote music for Ken Tynan's production of Maxwell Anderson's Winterset and for the Masque of Hope attended by the then Princess Elizabeth. Another such collaboration came to the notice of Muir Matheson who, consequently, introduced the young composer to the film industry by commissioning music for Crown Film Productions. It was "utility" music for which composers seldom received a credit but it did have financial rewards. For example, music to portray the workings of machines was such "utility" music that could be called for.

Lessons were also given to the keen student by Sir Thomas Armstrong during the time Veale was with

Wellesz. Armstrong was organist at Christ Church, Oxford from 1933 to 1955. Veale's introduction to Armstrong was due to his father being registrar at the university at that time. From Armstrong, formal harmony and counterpoint including "species" counterpoint was learned.

The first professional performance of any work by John Veale was of his Symphony no 1 given in the Town Hall, Birmingham in 1948 by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducted by George Weldon. Wellesz admired it - but then Schoenberg liked Johann Strauss and Webern liked Schubert; Wellesz's approbation, on its own, does not necessarily prove anything. However, Sir John Barbirolli personally chose to perform the revised version at the Cheltenham Festival in 1951, thus endorsing the music's worth. It was the work that established the composer although he considered, as I do, that his first public success was Panorama for orchestra written in 1949 and first performed at the Malvern Festival in 1951 under Sir Adrian Boult. This work was so well-received that the audience demanded a repeat performance which was readily accommodated a few nights later cancelling Elgar's Wand of Youth which Sir Adrian, who did not like Elgar's music, was delighted to abandon!

The Symphony no 1 was written between 1945 and 1947 and is dedicated to the painter, Paul Nash. The history of the work's first performance is remarkable. The composer sent it to George Weldon who replied to the composer from his holiday venue in Cornwall saying that he would be happy to perform it. It was also given on the campus at Berkeley in California with the late Kurt Adler conducting. The revision which was to "tauten the detail" was the version Barbirolli presented at Cheltenham.

Mosco Carner thought the work to be "doom laden" - a most inapt description. The work is scored for triple woodwind, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings. Surprisingly for this composer there is no harp. The music is continuous but falls into three clearly defined sections - slow, fast, slow. All the material is derived from the four-note theme which opens the work (mysteriously on three clarinets) and its variants, a device which the composer was to use again, particularly in his Symphony no 2. The composer's material is treated very simply. One evident feature is the effective use of instruments to reveal their most telling characteristics with some very well-judged doublings. For example, cello with clarinet and viola with oboe. There is a tenderness and warmth combined with a nostalgia that is neither sentimental nor stagy. A careful listener may detect slight hints of the exoticism that was to come to the fore in Kubla Khan. The dependance on the four-note motif gives the work the disadvantage of predictability which reduces expectancy. The first climax, albeit brief, is effective and the Allegro moderato section has many expressive and indeed, touching moments. It may betray some fleeting influence of Roy Harris' Symphony no 3. The music becomes more animated and the strings, which bear the greatest responsibility for the music's exhilaration, would have been more thrilling if a greater compass had been given to them. There is a contagious trumpet tune and, at times, the music is well punctuated. After a momentary slow episode, the music regains its momentum with what, at first, threatens to be a fugue. The horns straining with their four-note motif is a tremendous moment and has a welcome repeat towards the end of the work. Fanfare-like material launches the symphony into the final section, an extended slow coda in which a declamatory style now appears. The marvellous climax on page 70 of the composer's manuscript is an example of the composer's confidence in simple, traditional harmony as the most effective means of expression. There is a brief and strong climax.

Perhaps it is not a symphony at all. Symphonic Fantasy might have been a more apt title for this fifteen minute work which has the artistic feel of a soliloquy. No one would claim it to be great music, or of possessing startling originality yet it is completely acceptable, enjoyable and unpretentious. It also succeeds from some lucid orchestration.

The Veales' first daughter, Jane, was born in 1947. She suffered from the awful blight of asthma which seriously affected her heart and lungs and led to her death in 1951. Her father composed the Elegy for flute, harp and strings in her memory. This was first performed by Richard Adeney, Maria Korchinska and the Boyd Neel Orchestra in Oxford in 1952.

In 1949 a Commonwealth Fellowship enabled John Veale to go to America for further studies for two years.

He obtained this Harkness grant by "simply filling in a form and being interviewed by a panel of establishment bigwigs". He studied for a year with Roger Sessions whose music belongs to the New England school of austerity; in his second year he was with Roy Harris, a composer whose outlook was very different. Veale was interested in modern American music and chose these two composers for the diametric polarity or opposition they represented - Harris for the primitive crudity (almost a counterpart to Grandma Moses) behind his undoubted originality; Sessions for the ultra-cerebral sophistication; Harris as the quintessential American rangy rustic; Sessions as the self-consciously quasi-European oppidan. He was an exceptionally likeable man, friendly, compassionate, generous-hearted and amusing. His views on life in general were akin to those of his English pupil - liberal, libertarian and humanitarian. He was also a humanist - yet his outstanding characteristic was his unrivalled intellectual power, musically and otherwise, although his mode of thought musically was rambling and prolix. He was an excellent teacher provided the pupil's approach was, like his, cerebral. If Sessions had a weakness it was in his need to be a disciple rather than a trail-blazer - first it was Ernest Bloch with *Black Maskers*, then Stravinsky with his powerful *Symphony no 1*, then Schoenberg with his *Symphony no 2*. Veale was particularly struck by the fact that Sessions spoke of such composers as if they were scientific theorists, to be proved right or wrong in their respective approaches. Much of Sessions' music is denigrated as being uneventful and severe, giving the impression of a lazy composer who was entirely un-self-critical. Incidentally, John Veale wrote the programme note for the first American performance of Sessions' *Symphony no 2* given in New York under Dmitri Mitropoulos. Today Roger Sessions is respected rather than admired but all his nine symphonies are impressive orchestral essays.

At the time he was studying with Sessions, Veale completed *Panorama* while residing in the Berkeley Hills overlooking San Francisco Bay. He sent the manuscript by surface mail as an entry for the Festival of Britain Concert in 1951. The composer told me that, at one time, he hoped the work might be lost at sea. It arrived too late to be included in the festival but David Willcocks, a member of the adjudicating committee, was so impressed with the score that he took the liberty of giving it to Sir Adrian Boult who was delighted to conduct it with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the Malvern Festival later that year. That it was repeated and upstaged Elgar was an historical milestone for John Veale. John Hollingsworth conducted it in a Promenade Concert during the 1955 season.

A fruitful three-week episode during the time he was with Harris, was a motor tour aimed at promoting the music of the American composer. It included meetings with, among others, George Szell and Thor Johnson and a performance of Harris' popular *Symphony no 3* conducted by an unknown adolescent prodigy called Lorin Maazel. Veale met other American composers, of course. He found Walter Piston vastly knowledgeable, genial, mildly cynical, world-weary and sadly caustic about his colleagues including Sessions and Harris. Virgil Thompson was ostentatiously homosexual, wittily waspish and rather superficial in his thinking although he was a very shrewd man. Peter Mennin was courteous and friendly and an admirer of Vaughan Williams but he was a vain and conceited man who countenanced odd behaviour such as accompanying his girlfriend as she walked in central New York dressed in jodhpurs and brandishing a riding-whip. However, from the benefit of his observations, Veale was probably inclined to suspect that Gershwin, Ellington and Cole Porter are the real twentieth-century representatives of American music, whereas it may be generally held that Aaron Copland symbolised the American dichotomy - now folksy, now atonal, according to which bandwagon he thought was going to roll. Harris took great pride in his "rangy" style. Having studied with Nadia Boulanger this was considered by some to be a passport to respectability as a truly modern composer. Some cynics used to aver that Boulanger was something of a racketeer - that half an hour with her earned the requisite certificate. Almost all young American composers belonged to some "school". Nonetheless, that country has produced a few outstanding composers including some who were pupils of Boulanger. Among these it is hoped that Irving Fine will soon be internationally recognised. His *Symphony*, which dates from 1962 is a totally satisfying piece of the very highest achievement, a work of quite overwhelming mastery and power.

The success of *Panorama* should have made John Veale's name but it did not. This may be due to prejudice or the fact that the composer was not a hustler by nature. Fashion of the day plays an important part. It used to be said that the only way to write a successful piece of music in the 1950s and 1960s was to inscribe the name Benjamin Britten on the score. *Panorama* is a robust score which pleases immensely. A friend, knowing

nothing of the piece, on hearing it, described it as a portrait of the USA in the 1930s with its "industrialised sound" and great urgency. The use of the tenor saxophone may have been employed to describe the less attractive side of San Francisco but it gives the piece a mild jazzy, and therefore American, flavour.

While in America, Veale composed a String Quartet first performed by a nameless quartet in Berkely in 1950. As music it is acceptable but the composer felt it did not seem to suit the chosen medium, being unidiomatic and homophonic.

The Clarinet Concerto dates from 1953, the year in which the composer's daughter, Sarah, was born. The first performance was given by Sydney Fell with the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Malcolm Sargent at the Royal Festival Hall in 1954. The work is monothematic and while it lasts only a quarter of an hour, it would have benefited from secondary and contrasted themes. However, the work is neither weak nor banal. It has an introspective poetry and a nostalgic tenderness that is never allowed to wallow into self-pity or sentimentality. It also has this rare quality of visually conjuring up Britain of the past. The first section is uncomplicated and leads to a faster section which is almost a *moto perpetuo*, certainly a *toccata*, although it has a solemn interruption early on. The music is playful but not flippant. The third section is slow and contains a *cadenza*-like passage before the poetry and introspection of the opening return; there is a brief dialogue between the soloist and the *cor anglais* which is one of the many aspects of the impressive orchestral colour of this work. Momentarily it loses direction but it ends with a flourish. The writing for the soloist is exemplary; the choice of its register throughout is beautifully judged and gives the clarinet and the work itself a definite sense of purpose. The music is not profound but is attractive and both playable and rewarding to perform. It is a work that should be taken up. Alun Hoddinott may have established himself with his Clarinet Concerto which now benefits from a commercial recording. Veale's is just as good and has the added advantage of presenting no aural problems.

For two years up to 1953 Veale intended to research a book on American composers and was awarded a Junior Fellowship at Corpus Christi College, Oxford to achieve this. That the book did not materialise is a cause for regret.

The Concert Overture: The Metropolis dates from 1955, the year of the birth of the Veales' son, Jacob. The work is dedicated to the London Symphony Orchestra who performed it for the first time at the Royal Festival Hall in 1957 in a series of concerts which, incidentally, included a performance of Humphrey Searle's magnificent *Riverrun*. Veale's work was conducted by Charles Groves and it was the first work he conducted at the Royal Festival Hall. The Metropolis received some adverse criticism but the Guardian wrote, "the orchestra appeared to relish the sophisticated evocation of the varying moods of a large city with the imaginative use of the orchestra and syncopated rhythms". For my part, I can only say that cities do not sound as appealing and harmonious as this score would suggest.

The first major film score was in 1954. This was *The Purple Plain* with a screenplay by Eric Ambler from a novel by H. E. Bates. It was produced for United Artists by John Bryan, directed by Robert Parrish and starred Gregory Peck, Bernard Lee, Maurice Denham, Brenda De Banzie and Lyndon Brook. It is a wartime survival story and it succeeded as a film largely due to a fine cast. Muir Matheson conducted the score, aspects of which can be detected in *Kubla Khan*, completed the following year. This is probably the composer's finest achievement in his first period of composition. Some of the harmonies and voice spacings give the work an ethereal feel, enhanced if the choir is well forward. This is music of a warm, lush and sensuous quality. The percussion captures the primitive elements of Coleridge's poem and the modality of the music gives it an exotic character. It suggests the ingenious atmosphere of the East, yet behind it stands the shadow of Vaughan Williams who is, undoubtedly, the finest British choral composer in the tonal tradition. This melodic score seems to evoke drifting clouds; is easy to listen to and the composer's intentions are very clear. Curiously, *Kubla Khan* and other works of John Veale have an extraordinary capacity to make one feel better. That observation may be treated with disdain in some quarters as it is neither musical nor academic but, like the music being discussed, it readily communicates its message. The distinguished baritone, Brian Rayner Cook, expressed a wish to take this work up.

Veale was a film critic for the Oxford Mail from 1965 and later, film correspondent until 1980 which, coupled with writing music for films, was his livelihood. 1955 saw the release of *Portrait of Alison*, directed by Guy Green and starring Robert Beatty and a thoroughly unlikeable Terry Moore. The following year came Philip Leacock's *The Spanish Gardener* based on the novel by A. J. Cronin and starring Dirk Bogarde and the dependable Michael Hordern. Veale's score is haunting and atmospheric without being obtrusive; the recurring theme associated with the boy in the film is memorable.

Song of Radha was conceived in 1966 and revised during 1980 and 1981. Between these versions the Veales were divorced and incidentally, Mrs Veale died in December 1987. As the title suggests, *Song of Radha* is an erotic love poem of Indian origin. The poem was especially written for the composer by David Pocock who, for many years, was professor of social anthropology at Sussex University. The work is scored for a soprano, who must possess both lyrical and dramatic qualities, and full orchestra including two harps, vibraphone and marimba. As with all truly successful vocal and choral music, the narrative is unfolded expeditiously and with minimum melismata thus allowing the music an effortless and unhindered flow. The soloist needs to have a young voice to suit the text and therefore, avoid the legion of examples in the world of vocal music, of ludicrous casting. It is, for example, ridiculous to have Juliet sung by a twenty stone soprano approaching her fifties.

The simplicity of the vocal writing in *Song of Radha*, which does not imply that it is easy to sing, gives the work a telling human quality that Vaughan Williams employed in such wonderful works as his *Sea Symphony* where, in the superlative second movement, the baritone sings, "On the Beach at Night Alone" as if it is almost speech. The soloist's entry in *Radha* is on the same principle, suggesting an Indian chant. This reappears throughout the work, as for example with the words,

"When it was winter round my heart then who has made it spring?"

The eroticism is never offensive either in the libretto or the music which is highly evocative and sensuous aided by the use of a double string orchestra. The girl sings of her passion, "sink slowly, slowly on me love - black cloud, dark king of my desire, my soul is in my hair when your hot breath blows there and where those firm lips slowly move, yours, yours, Govinda ... How can my flesh contain such pleasure, such pain, those feet, your feet, those thighs, your thighs, this breast, yours, yours, Govinda". There is a tremendous climax - a top C - on the word "screaming" which rises almost immediately after with the words, "a stranger in her arms and liquid fire streaming". The composer produces some highly affective orchestral effects throughout this quite splendid score. Strings col punta, sustained harmonies and the glowing use of the violin's G string in the passage "How softly on my throat his dark hair runs on my bruised breast his heavy head is sleeping still those amazing arms and thighs are keeping the mastery this golden lord has won". The work is not for soprano with accompaniment but for soprano and orchestra where the musical colours have been applied with a fastidious hand. The composer captures the ecstasy of love and its sometime-companion, of heartbreak, particularly in a doloroso passage towards the end of the work where a timpani C is played with both sticks and the oboes blend with the violins. I hoped that the composer would consider making this string passage "sul G" - a passage which reminds me of Leon Goossens's apt remark "the oboe is a lady". In this sad passage doubt is well portrayed while the soprano sings "Govinda has gone?" but fortunately, this is not overstated in a work which is structurally sound. It ends as it opened, giving the impression of true love's unending span.

There used to be a time, not so long ago, when such a subject as implicit in *The Song of Radha* would be banned or, at least, discouraged from concert halls, theatres and studios even if the works were by Puccini and Verdi. Today, such censorship does not exist for it even allows such material as the homosexual love duet which concludes Britten's *War Requiem* which has offended some in a career which has projected an image of shallowness and insincerity.

John Veale's *Symphony no 2 in D minor* dates from 1964 and is in four movements lasting about forty minutes. As with *Radha* it awaits its first professional performance although Ruth Gipps gave it two readings with her London Repertoire Orchestra in 1968. Dr Gipps is a musician of reliable, if catholic, judgement and

she and the orchestra liked the symphony. "We wouldn't have played it twice if we had not liked it the first time", she told me emphatically. The work germinated from the first four notes of the extended slow cor anglais solo that opens the work which I detect to be autobiographical. If the oboe is a lady then it should be remembered that oboists play the cor anglais. The main thrust of the first movement is a Moderato leading to an Allegro returning, in turn, to Moderato and then the Lento cor anglais soliloquy. The music is eminently acceptable but is not very adventurous. The second movement, Vivace, is akin to a burlesque and is frivolous - but the composer still seems to be under restraint. The third movement is probably the most successful and is marked Andante con amarezza and has tragic overtones redolent of guilt, shame or discovery; the soulful cor anglais makes its point effectively in music that has purpose and character; the powerful climaxes naturally evolve; there is a passion which recalls the language of Radha although this magnificent slow movement is more intense. The finale is an Allegro which, after a tremendous climax, breaks out into a fugue which the composer found to be "a rewarding challenge". The use of this device may take the music out of the inspirational into the academic. The opening of the symphony is recalled in the closing pages; the special material hitherto given to the cor anglais is employed elsewhere. The reappearance in a different guise may have an autobiographical or, perhaps, a symbolic significance.

Such music is at the mercy of conductors. It demands and deserves performances that can judge every nuance.

The Demos Variations for orchestra were completed in 1986 and dedicated to his two children. As the title suggests, the work implies an optimistic view of human nature. The piece falls into four sections and is symphonic in outlook if not design. The music is attractive and robust and the orchestration is richly coloured. It is a compelling piece and very exciting.

Between the years of 1968-1987 John Veale was a copy editor for Oxford University Press which, to quote him, "meant having to read and edit masses of sociological rubbish". There were also books on law, literature, politics, art, philosophy and history. Perhaps the most notable undertakings were of a new edition of the complete work of Jeremy Bentham, dealing with constitutional and social organisation and Karl Popper's Objective Knowledge.

The Violin Concerto was finished in 1984. Erich Gruenberg gave the first performance in a studio concert in Manchester in 1986. Although the work was liked, curiously nothing was said about it in the media or music journals, thus signifying it as a non-event which is gross injustice. Had it been written by Tippett, articles about it would have appeared almost everywhere. It is strange since Veale's Violin Concerto would have a wider appreciative audience than any of Tippett's later works. All this highlights the pernicious vagaries of musical fashion, controlled it would seem, by a minority influencing the majority to kowtow to the opinions of a few. This has been the death-knell of many careers in music. The international soloist, Tasmin Little, has expressed her enthusiasm for "this beautiful work."

I suggested to the composer that the violinist, Lydia Mordkovitch, perform it which she did, recording it on Chandos. It became a best seller. Many have expressed that it is the finest British violin concerto and they are probably right.

With this concerto, Veale makes one of his most profound statements to date. The large opening movement is leisurely; the central lament is of a very personal and compulsive utterance; the finale approaches a "knockabout" sense of high spirits. The music is tonal, immediate, refreshing, well-written, beautifully balanced and eloquent.

John Veale continued to compose in his painstaking way along his chosen path. He contemplated another string quartet and a concertante work for flute. Regrettably, he regarded writing for the piano his Achilles heel as, in fact, do many other composers. This has hindered his writing songs which is indeed a pity bearing in mind his aptitude for setting words. He completed a large-scale oratorio-style Apocalypse, which he considered to be his best work. It is written with that consistency which has been a feature throughout his life.

Other later works include Encounter for two guitars, Triune for oboe / cor anglais and orchestra premiered by Nicholas Daniel who "fell in love with the piece", Sydney Street Scenes for chorus and instrumental ensemble given its successful first performance in Australia in 1995 and the Symphony no 3 dedicated to the author of this article. This is a very strong and impressive piece with an overwhelming appeal. I am so honoured to have his finest work dedicated to me

John Veale was stoical about his rejection in the musical climate of today which is perverse. If a composer writes "way out" music it is the subject of hostility and he is labelled a crank or schizophrenic; conversely, if a composer writes melodic music of obvious quality, as does John Veale, he is castigated as unoriginal and his music as an anachronism. The truth of the matter is that there is outstanding music in both camps; one camp impresses the intellectual and occasionally the emotions; the other camp registers more easily with the ear. All discerning music-lovers devoid of prejudice will value music of both types since artistic greatness is not exclusive to one style alone.

John was plagued with cancer for the last fifteen years of his life. Six months before his death on 16 November 2006 he moved to Bromley to be near his family to whom he was devoted and of whom he was very proud.

After his death several people including Lewis Foreman said that John was a victim of William Glock's policies when he was Controller of Music at the BBC. This is completely untrue and I recommend you read my two articles about Glock on this site.



As a man, he was sincere, honest and a thoroughly decent human being. He was never unpleasant or scathing about anyone. He was a keen astronomer and ornithologist, a successful campaigner for human rights and justice including campaigning on local issues in his rural Oxfordshire. He had an incredible mind and a vast knowledge of countless subjects. He edited many of my articles and would insist that a writer must be honest and reveal proven facts, however distasteful they could be. Although he was an agnostic, he believed the Biblical doctrine that the truth sets you free.

Even when his hearing, sight and concentration were in rapid decline he retained the inextinguishable spark.

On his passing, I rescued his String Quartet and edited it. I was the only person who had a copy. It was given a very successful performance in Oxford two years ago and warmly received and there are plans to record it.

John Veale's music would be enjoyed everywhere but first, it has to be made available. It must not languish in oblivion.

See also [John Veale as I knew him](#)

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