

The Fenby Legacy

Appalachia, Sea Drift, A Mass of Life, Songs of Sunset, An Arabesk, A Song of the High Hills, Requiem, Songs of Farewell. It is in the great choral and orchestral works that we find the essential Delius and the breadth of his philosophy and vision. One may, rightly, add other masterpieces - purely orchestral works, operas, a chamber work or so, but what is clear beyond any doubt is that no list of the Delius canon would be complete without that last yea-saying to life, the *Songs of Farewell*.

Passage to you! O secret of earth and sky...

I stand as on some mighty eagle's beak, eastward the sea, absorbing, viewing...

Joy, shipmate, joy! Pleased to my soul at death I cry...

Now finale to the shore, now land and life finale and farewell...

These glorious words already existed in the poetry of Walt Whitman, but without Eric Fenby the soaring music of Delius, which now seems to be their indivisible complement, would have remained forever locked in the mind of the composer, stillborn, unwritten.

On October 28th 1978 we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of Eric Fenby at Grez-sur-Loing. This is an appropriate occasion to pay homage to the selfless effort of Delius's amanuensis, as the universities of Jacksonville, U.S.A., Bradford and Warwick, England, pay their tribute by the award of honorary doctorates. The music that was produced during those last six years of Delius's life is undoubtedly the conception of the composer; nevertheless the legacy of those final years is the legacy of Eric Fenby, for without him there would be no *Song of Summer*, no third Violin Sonata, no *Idyll*, no *Songs of Farewell*, nor a whole host of other dictated works and arrangements.

In his classic account *Delius as I Knew Him*, Fenby has told the moving story of the closing years of Delius's life. (Sad to say, the text of this book is now in the public domain in America, reprinted at an exorbitant price with no royalties going to the author.) He has also written the perceptive study on Delius in Fabers' series of the lives of great composers and is at present working on a definitive text which considers the composer's development and gives Delius's own views as to how he would have wished his music performed. In this article we concentrate on his most important role in the life of Delius, the music which he made it possible for Delius to communicate and for us to hear.

Delius always refused to talk about his method of composition. To him this was a private matter; scholastic intrusion would be akin to tearing the petals of a rose in an attempt to divine the secret of its inner beauty. To do justice to the work of Fenby, however, a measure of analysis becomes inevitable. In particular it is fascinating to consider the meagre sketches from which the two men worked, for every product of their unique partnership existed in some form before they began. Delius only worked on a piece of music when he felt the flow of

inspiration within him; he would never allow mere technique to turn an uninspired handle. So it was that when he became paralysed and blind a number of works were in the process of composition, some virtually complete, but others just a few outline sketches on scraps of paper. The assessment of the work of Delius and Fenby becomes immeasurably complicated by the fact that Jelka Delius tidied up the Delius possessions after the composer's death and in doing so destroyed most of the sketches. We must therefore rely on the memory of Fenby for those vital facts, and fortunately this memory remains vibrantly clear.

The first collaboration which Delius and Fenby completed was *Cynara*, at the request of Beecham for something new for baritone and orchestra for the 1929 Delius Festival. Fenby discovered the orchestral score essentially complete up to and including the baritone's words "and the lamps expire". Delius dictated a further 19 bars to complete the work and made certain other alterations earlier in the score by extending two chordal passages in the orchestra so that they made their full effect. (He had used the same extension process for a like purpose in making his final version of *Paris*.) The passages concerned in *Cynara* finally became the eleventh bar of D to the sixteenth in the full score (just after the words "flung roses, roses riotously with the throng"):

The image shows a musical score for the first passage. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. A bracket above the treble staff spans from the eleventh bar to the sixteenth bar, indicating an extension of the original material. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines in both staves.

and the seventeenth bar of E to the twentieth (after "and for stronger wine"):

The image shows a musical score for the second passage. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The music is written in a key with two flats (Bb and Eb) and a common time signature. A bracket above the treble staff spans from the seventeenth bar to the twentieth bar, indicating an extension of the original material. The notation includes various chords and melodic lines in both staves.

Each was essentially extended by adding the two passages marked in brackets, making minor changes from the original to accommodate the additions.

The version used in the 1929 Festival ended at letter G:

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Cy-na-ra in my fashion." It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with the lyrics "Cy-na-ra in my fashion." The middle staff is for the cello, marked "cello solo". The bottom staff is for the trombones, marked "trombones". There are also markings for "viola solo", "strings, W.W.", "strings, horns, bassoons", and "drum". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Afterwards, Fenby suggested lengthening the close by using the violin solo from the beginning of the work:

The image shows a musical score for a violin solo. It consists of a single staff in treble clef, marked "(8va)". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Delius agreed, and by dictation the final chord was replaced by the last eight bars in the score.

It was after the success of this work at the 1929 Festival that Delius told Fenby that he wished to continue to work with him.

The second work to be completed, *A Late Lark*, involved a similar problem. Delius had almost completely sketched the score before his sight failed. Fenby found it so badly written that he could hardly read it. The vocal line was complete to the words "splendid and serene", some of the orchestral parts ending two bars earlier. This left seven bars of music for the strings and five bars in the other parts to complete. Fenby was struck by the fact that the last violin solo, six bars before the end of the sketch, seemed unsatisfactory to him:

The image shows a musical score for a violin solo. It consists of a single staff in treble clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

He felt that the rise to F sharp pre-empted the climax on the final E flat, and suggested changing the E flat to a top G, thus resolving the earlier F sharp. Delius agreed, but placed the G in the tenor part on the word 'let', composing the last seven bars by dictation.

In the case of the song *Let Springtime come, then* it was found that the published piano score was a later variant from that used to prepare the earlier orchestral version. Here it was a (relatively) simple task to bring the last eight bars of the orchestral version into line by

dictation. (A facsimile of the final manuscript orchestral score is on page 36 of Fenby's *Delius* (Faber).)

The next major task was the Violin Sonata no. 3. A few phrases were extant on scraps of paper, the first movement being represented by three ideas:



It took a complete session of dictation to extend the first idea to this:



Afterwards, as the music took shape, daily sessions yielded much greater progress.

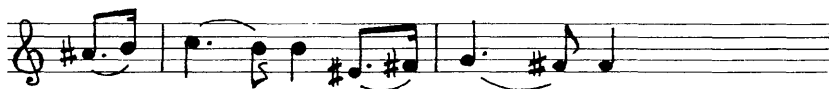
The opening of the second movement had been sketched by Delius, something like this:



It was the sketching of the second theme of this movement which was Fenby's first attempt at work with Delius, so movingly described in his book and now transposed from A minor to G minor:



The last movement was represented by two sketches, the first eight bars in full and the following phrase:



The sonata was eventually completed by dictation in 1930 and dedicated to May Harrison. During its composition, the relationship between composer and amanuensis had matured and on occasion, Fenby was able to suggest that the chords which Delius dictated lay awkwardly for his small hands, tactfully suggesting an alternative disposition, though never altering the harmony.

A Song of Summer was next to be completed; though it had been the first task to be started, its composition overlapped those already mentioned. As is well known, it is a reworking of *A Poem of Life and Love*, which Delius had virtually completed in 1918. A two-piano manuscript arrangement of the original tone poem arranged by Balfour Gardiner and Eric Fenby is in the Delius Trust Archive, so it is a simple technicality to discover the actual changes in the score which gave rise to the final published version. At the outset Delius had asked Fenby his opinion of *A Poem of Life and Love*, which Fenby gave with typical Yorkshire candour. For instance he found a chromatic seventh (marked with an asterisk in the following quotation) to be utterly distasteful:

In the final version it is deleted (bar 116). Following Fenby's evaluation of the work, Delius asked Fenby to work on the material himself, then subsequently they modified the music by dictation over the years, restoring music which had been cut by Fenby, rewriting unsatisfactory passages and dictating new material until Delius was entirely satisfied. The first fifteen bars were dictated anew (the only instance Fenby knows

of Delius not working at the keyboard, either by himself before he was crippled, or through the hands of Fenby in the closing years.) From bar 16 to bar 58 is essentially original, bar 59 to 66 are reworked by dictation, followed by newly dictated material to bar 89. Bars 90 to 146 are basically original, with minor alterations such as the deleted chord at bar 116, and the closing bars (147-155) are new.

The great triumph of their collaboration is *Songs of Farewell*. Jelka Delius had selected the poems some years before and the sketches in existence were just a handful of phrases and chordal progressions, sometimes indicating the harmonic direction of the movement roughed out in pencil and written mainly on billheads during Delius's last walking tour to Norway (probably 1920). Essentially, the first song was represented by three and a half bars of the opening cello melody plus the bassoon harmonies of bars three and four. The third movement had two sketches, a chordal outline of the opening, something like this:

and, on another piece of paper, were three bars of a bass melody which eventually underpinned the chorus at "passage to you":

The fourth movement "Joy, shipmate, joy" was represented by four bars of outline choral harmony with the words written underneath, after this fashion:

Joy shipmate joy - pleased to my soul at death I cry



Dr. Eric Fenby photographed with flute soloist Elena Duran outside the Guildhall, Southampton, after his recent recording session. (See Editorial.)

Photograph: Courtesy of E.M.I.

Did Delius Live here?



The illustration reproduced above was supplied by Mr. John Coveney of New York, who came across it reproduced on page 47 of *Journey to Upolu: Robert Louis Stevenson, Victorian Rebel* by Edward Rice, published by Dodd, Mead & Co. of New York in 1974. The caption reads "Greiz at the time the Stevensons and other foreign artists had discovered it as a summer resort", and this led Mr. Coveney to suggest that the two houses with the covered courtyard between them may have been the ones that eventually were joined to form the building where Delius wrote his greatest works. Certainly we do know that Delius's house originated in such a manner, but reference to the Robert Louis Stevenson collection at Yale University produced the original drawing with a different caption. The latter ascribed the print to Barbizon in 1880 (some years after Stevenson had left the area), and attached the signature "Jacques". Mr. Coveney then contacted Edward Rice, who stated that he had reason to believe that the scene was Greiz, not Barbizon, but that the artist was a member of the Barbizon school.

Who was Jacques and was this the Delius house? A lack of exact correspondence of the other landmarks in the village could be attributed to artistic licence; on the other hand, such houses were common in France at the time concerned. One thing is certain: whichever village is represented, the illustration is relevant to Christopher Redwood's article *Greiz before Delius* in *Journal* no. 42 (copies still available, price 50p inclusive of postage.) The picture above is reproduced by kind permission of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; that opposite is of Delius's house in 1937, and was taken by F. L. Ryan Esq.





Eric and Rowena Fenby photographed in the garden of Elgar's birthplace by Gilbert Parfitt in April 1976.

The closing movement was given in exactly the same manner by chords and words:

A musical score for a closing movement. It consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains several chords, some with accidentals (sharps and flats). The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a series of notes, some with accidentals, and rests.

Now finale to the shore

It has often been remarked that the first two movements seem to contain quotations from *Hassan*; Fenby himself has mentioned this in *Delius as I Knew Him*, though he never discussed it with Delius at the time. Bars 27-32 of the first *Song of Farewell* correspond to material from the Prelude to Act III of *Hassan*:

A musical score for bars 27-32 of the first *Song of Farewell*. It features two staves. The upper staff is labeled 'horns' and contains a melodic line with triplets. The lower staff is labeled 'strings' and contains a bass line with sustained notes and triplets. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

A glance at the score of *Songs of Farewell* shows that this arises naturally from material in bar 12:

A musical score for bar 12 of the first *Song of Farewell*. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with triplets. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with triplets. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Similarly, the *Hassan* motif (Prelude to Act V), which appears in the second *Song of Farewell* at bar 72, grows out of a phrase in bar 69 (which itself develops from the earlier flow of ideas):

Two musical scores side-by-side. The left score is for bar 69 of the second *Song of Farewell*, showing a melodic line in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. The right score is for bar 72, showing a melodic line in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. Both scores have a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

It seems highly unlikely that Delius set out to introduce these quotations by such a roundabout route; it is far more likely that they just arose naturally in the course of composition. This accords with Eric Fenby's view, for when Delius dictated them, he distinctly remembers recalling the Hassan connections, but did not mention them lest he broke the spell of Delius's intense concentration at the time. Since Delius worked on the *Songs of Farewell* before composing *Hassan*, it is quite possible that he used material from the *Songs* in *Hassan* rather than the other way round.

In 1930 Beatrice Harrison asked Delius if he could write a piece for her American tour. The unusual chamber orchestra scoring was specified by her, because of the reduced resources which would be available to her on her travels. Delius dictated *Caprice and Elegy* in its entirety, based on a few sketches which Fenby unearthed. These were the opening four bars of harp arpeggios (which he remembers were in the hand of Jelka Delius), the opening two bars of 'cello melody in the *Caprice* and the opening four bars of the *Elegy* (the latter with an outline chordal accompaniment).

The *Irmelin* prelude of 1931 is based on material from Acts I and III of Delius's early opera. The middle section of the recomposed prelude (bars 22 to 52) is a transposed reworking of material which Fenby found in Act III, based on the following theme:

The image shows a musical score for a theme in F sharp minor. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody in the treble staff begins with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5, then a quarter note B4, and finally a quarter note A4. The bass staff provides a chordal accompaniment with half notes: F#3, C#4, and G#4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

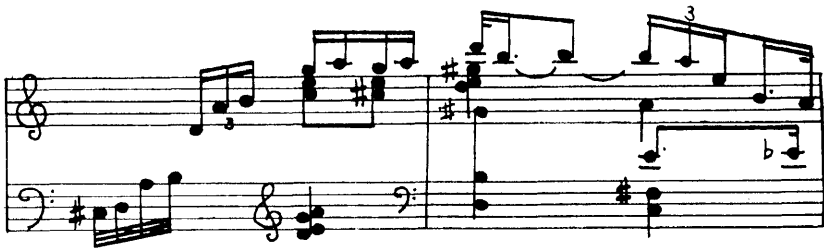
Delius asked Fenby to transpose this into F sharp minor, and, having listened to the available music played at the piano, he began dictating. He did not indicate that the piece would be in ABA form at the outset—such terminology would have been foreign to him—but his amanuensis recalls that it might have helped to know where they were going, especially when Delius dictated the passage from bar 38 to 41 which ends up in F sharp major. Apart from this passage, every bar of the new work can be found in the old, judiciously pruned and reorganised, but it was in no way sense a “cut and paste job”, being a completely dictated work. It is an object lesson in the fluid way it transforms the static composition of the earlier work into a mature and satisfying miniature.

The *Fantastic Dance* existed as a sketch of the first twenty bars, complete in full score. Not one note needed to be changed. New material was then dictated, returning to the opening music at bar 60, followed by a newly-composed coda (bars 72-79). It was completed in

1931, dedicated to Eric Fenby, and published by Boosey and Hawkes in 1933, as a set of parts with a piano conductor score which opened like this:



The first verse of the song *Avant que tu ne t'en ailles* had been written by Delius in 1919 (20 bars); the rest was dictated, incorporating a sketch of a piano part which became the accompaniment of bars 48, 49:



The story of the *Idyll* has already been documented. Its composition was spread over the years 1930 to 1932, and was a major task of reorganising music from the opera *Margot la Rouge*, incorporating words of Walt Whitman selected by Robert Nichols. The concordance between the original music of the opera and the final version of the published *Idyll* is to be found in Rachel Lowe's Catalogue of the Archive of the Music of the Delius Trust. This was the last completed work of the Delius-Fenby collaboration.

There remain a number of arrangements. In 1932 Albert Sammons asked for a piece for his string orchestra, but Delius was unable to work at the time. Fenby remembered the two choruses *To be Sung of a Summer Night on the Water* and suggested a transcription, which he did himself, with Delius's approval, to create the *Two Aquarelles* for strings. In the same year he arranged a Suite from *Hassan* for full orchestra in a scoring specified by Delius. During the time of his collaboration, Fenby also made a number of other transcriptions, which are listed in Robert Threlfall's article in *The Composer* (Spring 1976 issue).

At the end of his life, Delius asked Fenby to play through all his unpublished scores to him, then decided that there was nothing further to do. Perhaps it was in the light of this decision that Jelka Delius burned all the sketches; we shall never know.

Nor will we ever have a full insight into the working of the Delius-Fenby partnership. Their collaboration matured over a number of years

so that a description of what may have happened at one time may not apply to another. Sometimes, as in the dictation of the end of *Cynara*, Delius knew precisely what he wanted and it was Fenby's task to get it down on paper. Delius would call out the notes and Fenby would simultaneously play them at the keyboard and write them down. On other occasions Delius would not be so sure and would think aloud without any clear conception of what he wanted. Such times must have been enormously exasperating for the young amanuensis. His fingers could find a chord on the piano far quicker than the inadequate communication of speech could unfold the musical ideas in Delius's fertile brain, especially when they were working on a recomposition of familiar music, such as the *Irmelin* Prelude. If he was wrong, he would be corrected, but if his solution satisfied Delius, it would be approved. In such a complex relationship, who would be able to divine the precise contribution of each participant? One thing is certain, that the catalytic action of Fenby was guided by the sincere desire to help the composer express his musical idea in writing, so that the final result committed to paper was always the will of Frederick Delius.

Sir Thomas Beecham once expressed the feeling to Fenby that he doubted the last *Song of Farewell* was the unaided work of Delius, on the grounds that Delius would never have begun a piece in five-four time. (Perhaps this explains the aberration in Sir Thomas's book on Delius, where he only refers to *four Songs of Farewell*. Fenby's philosophical remark at a later date was that this simply demonstrated Beecham's lack of understanding of the pride of Delius. Had he truly understood, then he would have realised that Delius was far too proud a man to let anyone else write his music for him. Though Fenby occasionally spoke up with true Yorkshire directness, he was very young when he worked with Delius, and as a young man in a house of older people, he simply did as he was told.

Anyone who has talked to him will be impressed with the pride that he takes in the small changes for which he was responsible—a chromatic seventh deleted in *A Song of Summer*, an E flat changed to a G in *A Late Lark*, the layout of chords in the *Third Violin Sonata*. Any self-seeker would surely have claimed more. Fenby merely claims that his facility for reading scores at the piano allowed him to act as the instrument through which the composer communicated his music. To this one must add his selflessness and his Yorkshire honesty, which made it possible for him to form a bond with his fellow Yorkshireman. He laid no claim to any creative part in the writing of the music and his name appears on only one score amongst the original Delius-Fenby collaborations. In all other cases he is credited on the piano reduction. Only in *Caprice and Elegy* is his name mentioned on the orchestral score and here, paradoxically, it is missing from the piano reduction, both of these being errors. These vagaries on the published scores have led to a number of misconceptions. For example, in the Catalogue of the Archive of the Delius Trust it is suggested that the orchestral score of *Caprice and Elegy* is a Fenby orchestration of the piano score, rather than the other way round, as asserted by Fenby. In *Gloria*

Jahoda's book *The Road to Samarkand*, Jelka Delius is attributed with taking down *Caprice and Elegy* by dictation. When told this, Fenby simply smiled and said "one learns new facts every day". On a recent recording of the Bournemouth Sinfonietta, the Intermezzo from *Fennimore and Gerda* is said to have been edited and arranged by Beecham, when in fact Fenby made the arrangement, seamlessly joining together three extracts from the opera. Fenby just remarked "those things don't matter". He regarded the task he had performed as a simple one and had no desire to have his name placed on the music as editor and arranger. For him, the only thing that mattered was the music and his desire to fulfil the wishes of Frederick Delius. For this reason he could be strong in his condemnation of anyone who played down Delius's part in the collaboration and bolstered his.

We only begin to see the true picture of Eric Fenby when we look beyond the six years that he was amanuensis and place it in the perspective of the rest of his life. As a child he showed great musical ability, with perfect pitch and a talent for reading orchestral scores at the piano which he developed by studying the scores of Elgar at the keyboard. He became apprenticed to the leading organist at Scarborough, gaining experience at the organ, training church choirs, preparing Gilbert & Sullivan operettas, and often offering to put the music away after a morning performance of the Spa Symphony Orchestra so that he might examine some passage that had interested him in the symphony that they had just played. His health was never good and he seriously considered entering a Benedictine monastery, when he heard of the plight of Frederick Delius, and, in his own words, "entered another kind of monastery — the Delius household". Here his talent for score-reading at the piano was put to good effect as he played Delius's work to him and struggled to take down his dictation.

It had been Delius's wish that Fenby be given the autograph scores after Delius's death. But that was part of a proposal in which the royalties from the music would go towards a concert, conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham, and including one work of Delius together with music by young English composers. Though Delius made a will to this effect, in a written statement taken down by Balfour Gardiner, it was still in the process of being legalised by Gardiner's lawyer when Delius died. Sir Thomas, through his solicitor Philip Emanuel, convinced Jelka otherwise, that all royalties should go to sponsoring her husband's music and the Delius Trust was set up with this in mind. The music thus went effectively to Delius's greatest interpreter, rather than his young amanuensis, and after the composer's death, Eric Fenby essentially faded out of the picture.

He took up a post with Boosey & Hawkes to build up their Hire Library. During his period with Boosey's, he introduced a variety of scores to the catalogue, including John Ireland's *London Overture* and Arthur Benjamin's *Jamaican Rumba*. Perhaps his greatest coup was to recommend the young Benjamin Britten. He continued to make arrangements of Delius's music, a *Koanga* selection, *La Calinda*, a suite from *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, and various reductions for piano and other instruments.

In 1939, just as he had written the film score for *Jamaica Inn* and other work was in the offing, he was pitchforked into the army where he conducted the Southern Command Symphony Orchestra and was commissioned in the Royal Army Education Corps. For three years he ran courses at the R.A.E.C. school at Cuerden Hall, Lancashire, before demobilization. After the war he found that staff from Universal Edition had been integrated into Boosey & Hawkes and there was no position available for him. By this time he was married and he eventually settled in Scarborough, bringing up two small children and taking a post as Head of Music at the Scarborough Training College.

At the death of Beecham in 1961, Eric Fenby was invited, as the only person of suitable stature, to take over the organisation of the 1962 Delius Centenary Festival. Since then, the music which it was feared would die with the wizardry of Beecham has been taken up by others and sees more performances now than ever before. Eric Fenby, honoured President of the Delius Society, has played no small part in this revival since moving back to London in 1964 to become Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music. He has visited America, first travelling to Jacksonville in 1966, then accompanying *A Mass of Life* on tour. His most recent visit was for the 1978 Delius Festival in Jacksonville, which the Board of Directors of the Delius Society of Florida unanimously voted to dedicate to him. On March 4th 1978, Jacksonville University conferred an honorary doctorate on him, to be followed in England by an honorary doctorate from the University of Warwick and the University of Bradford.

His advice is constantly being sought on new editions and on performances, including the recent recording of the Double Concerto and the Violin Concerto with Menuhin and Tortelier. He is recording the Violin Sonatas for the second time, first with Ralph Holmes, now with Yehudi Menuhin. He continues to be active with a large Delius correspondence. At the same time he is still making arrangements of Delius's music: *Late Swallows* (for string orchestra, 1963) *Five Little Pieces* (for small orchestra, 1964), *Elegy* (arranged for five 'cellos, 1975), *La Calinda* and *Air and Dance* (arranged for flute and orchestra, 1977), *String Quartet* (arranged for string quartet and string orchestra, 1977). His major current task is to complete his book on Delius's music and its performance. In fact in some ways the last fifteen years have been the most active years of his life, and his health, so often the cause for concern, has never been better. The work with Delius that dominated his life for six years, half a century ago, has once again brought him to the centre of the stage. Now the spotlight which he avoided before has perforce spilt some of its light on him. Justifiably so. He is now the only significant living link with the person of Frederick Delius, and we pay him double homage, for the work he continues to do today, and for the gift so freely given fifty years ago when he dedicated himself to the music of Frederick Delius and gave that proud composer the means to say his last farewell.
