

# PREFACE

The present volume contains the second and third of the three concertos for stringed instruments that Walton composed between 1928 and 1956. Although an indifferent performer on the violin, as well as the piano, it is clear that he favoured stringed instruments over keyboard or other orchestral instruments, even though he was tempted at one point to write a piano concerto for his friend Louis Kentner, and also contemplated a concerto for the clarinetist Frederick Thurston. It is true that the impetus to write his Viola Concerto came from Sir Thomas Beecham, who suggested to Walton that the outstanding British viola player Lionel Tertis deserved a modern concerto. Nevertheless it would seem that, thanks to early visits with the Sitwell brothers, it was Walton's love of Italy, with its delight in melody, that resulted in his choice of stringed instruments for the only concertos that he wrote. Furthermore, all three were designed with specific performers in mind, although only those for violin and cello benefited from the advice of their commissioners from the outset.

## VIOLIN CONCERTO

### Genesis

The year 1937, in which it is believed Walton began to consider writing his Violin Concerto, was something of a watershed in his way of life. Following the break-up of his affair with Baroness Imma Doernberg (the dedicatee of the First Symphony), Walton had formed a new relationship with the married Alice, Viscountess Wimborne. Twenty-two years his senior, she was rich, highly intelligent and still attractive. She was a great friend of Osbert Sitwell, and the new liaison caused what Walton termed 'a slight chilliness between me & Carlyle Squ.', that is to say the Chelsea house where he had been staying with the Sitwell brothers since 1919.<sup>1</sup> This, and a new-found affluence, had caused him to buy a house in Belgravia. Oxford University Press, his publishers, were not far away in central London and on the end of the phone, so relatively few letters from this period survive, certainly when compared to the number he was obliged to write after his subsequent move to the Italian island of Ischia (see Cello Concerto).

The great violinist Jascha Heifetz (often called 'the

Paganini of the twentieth century') was certainly in London in March and April 1937, as he made recordings there with John Barbirolli and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. In the absence of more precise details, it is therefore not unreasonable to ascribe to this period the following undated account of the gestation of Walton's Violin Concerto given by his friend Patrick ('Spike') Hughes in one of his volumes of reminiscences: 'Some years ago Jascha Heifetz asked me if I knew a young man by the name of Walton with whom he wanted to discuss a violin concerto. I said I did. Why? Well, could I bring him to lunch? I could and I did, and out of that lunch at the Berkeley [hotel] (smoked salmon and tournedos) came Jascha's commission for the Walton violin concerto'.<sup>2</sup> Walton, replying on 1 October 1973 to Alan Frank's request for information about the origins of the concerto, gives a slightly different version of events:

Heifetz date—1937–1938—I can't remember which, but it was thru' Willie Primrose [who had been playing the Viola Concerto and was a friend of Heifetz]. One Concerto begets another & Heifetz took us out to lunch at the Berkeley (the old one) (& paid for it). We discussed writing a Concerto. He'd already been disappointed by the Bax [which was written for him] & was v. wary. I wasn't all that keen knowing how difficult it could be. However we got as far as terms—1500 dollars or £300 (the £ was worth more than the dollar then). It was duly finished [...] I went with Alice to New York to see him. All more or less satisfactory. Not so many changes as one might have expected. They came later in the scoring [of the revised version] when I'd heard the recording of Cincinnati perf. with Heifetz and Rodzinski [*recte* Goossens]. As I was leaving the question of being paid arose. Was it £300 or 1500\$? I said £300, not realising by then that the pound was a bit shaky even in those days. So he then took out a bit of paper [,] rang up his bank & gave me 1493 dollars & some cents! He'd made on the deal!<sup>3</sup>

Characteristically, Heifetz seems to have struck another hard bargain, insisting on the 'gentleman's agreement that if he did not like it he need not accept it and if he did that he would take it for a couple of seasons exclusively'.<sup>4</sup> He also demanded that OUP supply him with his personal full score and a set of parts.

It would appear that no actual composition was done until January 1938. In a letter to his publisher and confidant Hubert Foss, received on the 27th of that month from the Wimborne country house of Ashby St. Ledgers, near Rugby, Walton signs off: "'Morning sickness" is beginning, otherwise not much progress'.<sup>5</sup> This can only refer to the

first stirrings of the concerto, the only major work that he had on the stocks at that time. But it was not only a question of ‘morning sickness’ at the outset of pregnancy, for at the end of 1937 Walton had suffered a double hernia and had been in hospital for several weeks. All this delayed work on the concerto. However, once ideas began to flow it would seem that the lyrical first movement, which commentators consider may reflect the benign influence of Alice Wimborne, took shape at the leisurely pace which was normal with Walton when engaged on major works.

### The British Council

However, a dramatic sideshow was about to take place. As a delayed antidote to the Great Depression, New York decided to stage an exciting, even futuristic, World’s Fair in 1939. A by-product of this was to be a series of concerts performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under their principal conductor, Sir Adrian Boult, and the British Council therefore became involved in showcasing newly commissioned works by British composers. Accordingly, following a Council meeting on 9 March 1938, Vaughan Williams, Bax, Bliss, and Walton were selected ‘to write a special composition which should be dedicated to the American people’.<sup>6</sup> Each composer was to be offered £250 by the Council, plus £100 should they wish to visit New York to supervise the performance of their work. Bliss, a member of the Music Committee, was delegated to write to Walton with this proposal, which he did on 15 April. In the meantime, Walton and Alice Wimborne had indulged in their mutual love of southern Italy and installed themselves in the luxurious Villa Cimbrone in Ravello, near Amalfi, recently vacated by Leopold Stokowski and Greta Garbo. On 28 April Walton wrote enthusiastically to Bliss: ‘Your letter has just been forwarded to me, for which many thanks. The proposal suits me admirably, that is, if everything can be arranged’. He proceeded to inform him about the new commission ‘& I have just got started on it’, but expressed some doubts about a collaboration between the British Council (who might insist on a British soloist) and Heifetz.<sup>7</sup> Matters dragged on, largely because of lack of information from the Council, but an extract from the minutes of the Music Committee’s meeting on 22 September 1938 gives the interesting information that Hubert Foss had reported that ‘the first two movements of Mr. Walton’s Violin Concerto were at present with Mr. Heifetz in America’. A further communication of 14 October from the Chairman of the committee urged Walton to make up his mind about the dual considerations of the British Council and Heifetz, and commented: ‘I understand from Mr. Foss that Mr. Heifetz has seen the

first two movements of the concerto, but has intimated that he cannot decide as to the work as a whole without knowledge of the last movement, and that this is not yet ready’. In his reply of 18 October, accepting the Council’s offer, Walton wrote that he would ‘abide by the decision they [the Council] come to as regards the soloist, and hope that it will turn out that Mr. Heifetz will be able to see his way to give the performance. I aim at having the Concerto finished by the end of November’. A communication from the Secretary to the Music Council to Walton of 9 February 1939 includes the important phrase: ‘as the Concerto which the Council commissioned from you is now finished ...’

### Composition

The British Council saga (still to be concluded) takes us ahead of the chronology of the concerto’s composition. The idyllic conditions at Villa Cimbrone clearly left their impression on the Italianate first movement. In a letter of 11 May 1938 to Hubert Foss, Walton reported that the concerto was ‘developing in an extremely intimate way’.<sup>8</sup> In a later letter, which he omitted to date, but which probably refers to some time in May or June, Walton announced: ‘I have been undergoing the usual travail & have dropped at last the 1st movement. Not too bad’. He continues: ‘Having been bitten by a tarantula [,] a rare & dangerous & unpleasant experience [,] I have celebrated the occasion by the 2nd movement being a kind of tarantella “Presto capricciosamente alla napolitana”. Quite gaga I may say & of doubtful propriety after the 1st movement, – however you will be able to judge’.<sup>9</sup>

As already stated, the first two movements were sent to Heifetz in America some time before 22 September 1938, and the third movement was completed back in England early in the New Year. A letter, dated 18 January 1939, from Dora Foss to her husband in the USA says that Walton had telephoned her saying ‘his difficulty is making the last movement elaborate enough for Heifetz to play it’. On 4 February she wrote again: ‘William isn’t at all pleased with the last movement, says it wants two months’ more work. Brosa not very enthusiastic’.<sup>10</sup> The reference to Antonio Brosa is to the distinguished violinist who had played an important soloistic part in Walton’s music for the film *Dreaming Lips*, which was recorded in late 1936. His lengthy account of the way in which Walton showed him the first two movements and asked for comments is so patently inaccurate in matters of chronology that it is of little importance in the present context.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, according to Brosa (who was to give the first performance of the Britten Violin Concerto in March 1940), Walton showed him the first two movements. It is possible that

Brosa was able to inform the composer of the distinctive qualities of Heifetz's style that he was then able to incorporate, quite apart from advising on other technical matters, prior to what Walton later sent to Heifetz. An undated letter from Walton to Foss, probably relating to early March 1939, announces: 'Just heard that Heifetz has accepted my concerto'.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately the welcome news was accompanied by the violinist's statement that it was too late for him to be interested in the World's Fair's proposal, so this put Walton in an awkward position vis-à-vis the British Council after such protracted negotiations and goodwill on their part. On 21 March Walton wrote a six-page letter to the Chairman of the Music Committee saying that 'after much thought and consultation I have come to the conclusion that although I lose financially it is only right for the sake of the work, to let Mr. Heifetz have it and abandon the World's Fair proposal of the British Council. [...] After all [,] having landed the biggest fish in the ocean of violinists, you will agree that it is hardly to be expected that I throw him back & take some smaller fry with obviously less advantages musically attached'. The press heard about the withdrawal and, still sore, the Chairman mischievously put it about that this was because the concerto was still unfinished.

### Visit to Heifetz

In a letter of 28 March that Walton wrote to the conductor Leslie Heward, he said 'I am going over [to America] some-time soon to work with Heifetz on the concerto',<sup>13</sup> and a postcard to Dora Foss from the luxury liner SS Normandie postmarked 'Le Havre à New York, 15 May 1939', announces 'Arrive tomorrow after a very good passage in this miracle of a ship'.<sup>14</sup> Heifetz had a farmhouse in Redding in the Saugatuck Valley, Connecticut, and it was there that Walton went to discuss details of the concerto and the solo line in particular. Two autographs of unusual interest, which Heifetz eventually presented to the Library of Congress in February 1952, give a very clear idea of what they worked from (see Sources). There had been something like three months between Walton finishing the concerto and his arrival in America; furthermore, he had sent Heifetz the first two movements at least nine months earlier. From an examination of both autographs it would appear that Walton had written what was, to all intents and purposes, a detailed violin and piano sketch, and that he had then made a form of digest from these two movements (the first with far fuller accompaniment than the more barren second) in order to give Heifetz the all-important information about the solo line. It is to be assumed that Walton in England retained the autograph violin and piano version in order to complete the orchestration, and also for the

émigré composer and pianist Franz Reizenstein to make the official (though unaccredited) piano reduction, using Walton's sketch (and presumably full score) as a basis. This was completed by the time Walton left for the USA. What Walton sent Heifetz, and what Heifetz subsequently worked on, is shown in Appendix I, minus the subsequent Heifetz alterations, fingerings and bowings of the eventual printed violin and piano edition.

Two surprising facts emerge. The first is how relatively little Heifetz has changed in the essence of the solo line; in other words, how well Walton has written for the violin and fully understood its technical, as well as musical, capabilities. The second is how musically imaginative and understanding Heifetz shows himself to be. Of course bowings, slurrings, phrasings, and changes from slurred to separate (and vice versa) were made, and regular bowings of convenience introduced (see bb. 92 and 97 of the first movement), even when this led to inconsistencies with repetitions of phrases, as in figs. 43 to 44. However, right from the third and eleventh bars, in which Heifetz has deleted Walton's up and down hairpins in order to establish an immediate *sognando*, Heifetz shows himself to be interested not only in the technical aspect of the solo part (especially in those matters in which he excelled, such as his famous up-bow spiccato) but also in the expressive. The solo line of this fascinating autograph, which later served as the basis for Heifetz's editing of the solo line for the 1941 OUP publication of the violin and piano score, can be reconstructed by comparing Appendix I with that publication.

Walton's autograph arrangement for violin and piano, although it contains some annotations and timings by Heifetz (seemingly made at the time of the first recording), remains remarkably as the composer wrote it. In other words, whatever alterations were agreed in Connecticut, Walton entered very few of them into his piano arrangement. Of greater interest is when and how he wrote the autograph full score. It would seem that the two processes went side by side—there was plenty of time for this to happen—and there is a telling internal memo from a member of staff at OUP's New York office to London saying: 'The day Walton arrived here he came into the office in a great rush to get photostat copies overnight of the third movement [full score?] and piano scores of his Violin Concerto'.<sup>15</sup> Most of what Heifetz suggested appears to have been granted immediately but, as will be seen, there were points which Walton clearly felt he wanted to consider at greater leisure.

Walton returned to England on 6 June 1939, and the days spent on the luxury liner were his last taste of *la dolce vita* for some time, because on 3 September Great Britain went to war with Germany. In a ten-page letter to Heifetz of

15 October Walton says: 'Thank you for your letter, since receiving it I have heard from Mr. Foss that the first performance is to be at Cleveland on Dec. 7th & 9th, and I am delighted about it. Alas, I don't think [,] owing to this something war, there is the slightest likelihood of my being able to get over for it [...] As for your alteration, I approve of it & send you some alternatives on a separate sheet [...] The only other suggestion I've made (in the 1st movement) is also on it'. This concerns Heifetz's suggested alternative to the fourteen largely solo bars before fig. 63 in the last movement. Walton goes on to say: 'Also could you [...] send me a photostat copy of your violin part as you will be playing it. I ask this, as we wish to get it in print (proofs only, not to be published till the date you stipulate) before the cost of printing becomes prohibitive'. In a postscript he adds that it might be best to cut down the strings to 6-5-4-3-2 desks while the solo is playing, as he had done successfully in his Viola Concerto.<sup>16</sup>

### Performance

As planned, the premiere of the Violin Concerto duly took place on 7 December 1939 in Cleveland, Ohio, at Severance Hall with Heifetz and the Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Artur Rodzinski. It was repeated two days later. Writing shortly afterward to Hubert Foss, Walton said: 'Here are the cables: Concerto enormous success. Orchestra played superbly you would have been extremely pleased. Congratulations your most successful concerto. Writing sending programme. Best greetings Heifetz'.<sup>17</sup> The other enthusiastic cable came from the wife of the chief conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Eugene Goossens. And it was Goossens, with his orchestra, who made the first commercial recording of the concerto with Heifetz on 18 February 1941, even though the original performers, who were not contracted to record for RCA Victor, had just given the first New York performance at Carnegie Hall on 5 February.<sup>18</sup>

### Publication and Revision

Wartime conditions accounted for an unprecedented two-and-a-half-year delay between the completion of composition and first publication of a major Walton work. Heifetz sent over his edited solo line, but this was sunk somewhere in the mid-Atlantic. Fortunately a photocopy had been made in New York and this finally reached London by air, so that the violin and piano reduction version of the concerto could be published by OUP in September 1941. The first British performance did not take place until a Royal Philharmonic Society concert in a sparsely filled Royal

Albert Hall on the afternoon of Saturday, 1 November 1941, with the Danish violinist Henry Holst and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Walton. On the following Monday the critic of *The Times* may have given Walton food for thought when, in the course of a generally positive review, he wrote: 'There are here many moments of distinctive beauty, though also not a few where the rapid movement, the intricate passage work and the explosive orchestration (especially when heard in the reverberating Albert Hall) may be thought to be at variance with the prevalent lyricism declared in the opening cantilena'. Eleven days later Holst and Walton repeated the performance with the evacuated BBC Symphony Orchestra in the Corn Exchange, Bedford, in a broadcast concert which also included the first British performance of his new overture *Scapino*.

Walton was an inveterate reviser, and these performances under his direction, later augmented by reference to the Heifetz recording, induced him to rethink and lighten the orchestration, especially as the full score had not been published. On 23 December 1943 he wrote to his occasional assistant Roy Douglas: 'I have been taking the opportunity during a lull in [the composition of the music for the film] *Henry V* to rescore the Vl. Con. I started out to do a little patching here & there but found it not a satisfactory way of doing it, so more or less I started from the beginning [...] I sent it to be copied next [?] week in the hope the parts will be ready for a performance at Birmingham [*recte* Wolverhampton] on Jan 17th. If they are ready you must come down & hear it. I think now that I've got it as good as I can get it'.<sup>19</sup> Walton used a similar-sized orchestra for his revision, except that the percussion section no longer included castanets, glockenspiel, bass drum and tam-tam, and was used more sparingly. Instead of writing out a new full score, he surprisingly re-used that of the 1939 version by rubbing out everything he wished to change. Comparison between the new autograph and a photocopy of the old shows that the pagination, barring, and solo line therefore remain identical, as do the instrumental accolades, except in those places where he required a different distribution. Six pages of the third movement were entirely rewritten. Henry Holst was again the soloist when the revised version was first given in Wolverhampton on 17 January 1944 by the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (of which he was leader) under Malcolm Sargent.

In mid-1944 OUP was able to undertake the engraving of a study score of the revised Violin Concerto; this was done from a second copy of the revised full score.<sup>20</sup> In a letter of 21 June 1945 to Benjamin Britten, congratulating him on the success of his just-premiered opera *Peter Grimes*, Walton

wrote: 'I meant to have written you before but have these last days been overwhelmed by proofs of my Violin Concerto & I fondly but vainly hope to get the score out in time for the "Prom" performance which I hope you may be able to hear. I say fondly and vainly as I have been four months getting the 2nd proofs'.<sup>21</sup> This was wishful thinking on Walton's part; the study score was not officially published until 29 November of that year. The solo line was not that of his autograph full score, but the one shown in the published violin and piano reduction of 1941, minus the Heifetz bowings and fingerings. Although Walton responded to a list of queries from Roy Douglas by replying simply 'Yes' or 'No', the proofreading process was far from satisfactory and, following a renewed scrutiny by Douglas, corrected impressions of the score had to be issued in 1952 and 1969. The Heifetz/Walton wheel finally came full circle when they both recorded the concerto for HMV with the Philharmonia Orchestra on 26–7 June 1950.<sup>22</sup>

Walton was always grateful to Heifetz for commissioning the concerto and, as conductor, aided and abetted his brilliant, pacy, though emotionally cool interpretation, one that several other violinists have tried to emulate. However, he reserved his greatest praise for the interpretation of his friend Yehudi Menuhin, with whom he re-recorded the concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra in July 1969. The letter he wrote to Menuhin on 21 April 1970, after hearing the disc, contains feelings that are surely of considerable significance in connection with the concerto's essential poetic lyricism: 'Your playing is absolutely astounding, in fact I am unable to conjure up adequate superlatives for your interpretation & performance—nor can I thank you enough for having brought to life a dream which I thought would never come true'.<sup>23</sup>

## CELLO CONCERTO

The success that Heifetz achieved in commissioning a violin concerto from Walton was doubtless very much connected with the genesis of the Cello Concerto. Born three years after Heifetz in 1903, the Russian cellist Gregor (Grisha) Piatigorsky was, with Pablo Casals, Emanuel Feuermann, and Mstislav Rostropovich, one of the undisputed leading cellists of the twentieth century. As far back as the summer of 1934, Prokofiev had begun a concerto for him. After a series of highly successful appearances with various orchestras in the USA, he had become a naturalized citizen of that country in 1942. More importantly in the present context, since the mid-1940s he had been playing and recording chamber music with his friend and Los Angeles neighbour,

Heifetz, and it is to be assumed that when he contemplated commissioning a concerto, the precedent of Walton's concerto for Heifetz would have been uppermost in his mind.

## Genesis

In his autobiography, Ivor Newton, the pianist and regular Piatigorsky accompanist, gives the following account of the origins of the Cello Concerto:

Piatigorsky much admired the concertos for viola and violin by Sir William Walton, and wanted Walton to write a cello concerto for him. I was deputed to discuss the possibility with Sir William, a coolly elegant and at the same time entirely professional and business-like composer who prefers to keep profundities of feeling for his compositions and not waste them in conversation. 'Would you consider writing a cello concerto for Piatigorsky?' I asked him. 'I'm a professional composer,' was the reply. 'I'll write anything for anybody, if he pays me.' In a moment, came an afterthought in which Sir William's impishness, one of the qualities that audiences have learned to recognise in his music, won a minor victory. 'I write much better if they pay me in dollars,' he said. Incidentally, when Piatigorsky met Sir William, he was deeply impressed. 'I have never,' he said firmly, 'met such a rare combination of greatness and simplicity'.<sup>24</sup>

No date is given for this meeting, but an internal OUP memo, dated 21 December 1954, announces: 'PIATIGORSKY has commissioned a CELLO CONCERTO from WALTON, probably paying him \$3000 for 2 years' rights. Possible premiere at Edinburgh Festival 1956'.<sup>25</sup> Also, it is possible that Ian Hunter, managing director of Harold Holt Ltd. and agent to both player and composer, had played a matchmaker role in bringing the two together. A letter from Walton to his publisher Alan Frank of 18 July 1955 ends with the lines: 'I've as yet not made much progress, if any with [the] cello concerto. I must admit I've not been trying very hard, but will pull myself together shortly I hope'.<sup>26</sup> By 24 August he was writing to David Webster, General Manager of the Royal Opera House: 'Also I think now I'm embarked on the Vlc. Con. that I ought to finish it. It is fairly well under way & if it wasn't for my visit to the U.S. & to Milan in Dec, it would be finished by Xmas'.<sup>27</sup> A more pressing commission for an overture intervened and resulted in the *Johannesburg Festival Overture*, but Walton was soon back working on Piatigorsky's cello concerto.

At this point it may be stated that the correspondence with Piatigorsky on the subject of the composition and first performances of the Cello Concerto is voluminous, and contrasts greatly with the relative paucity of information about the genesis of the Violin Concerto. It so happens that the concerto was one of four works chosen to be represented at unusual length (though, even so, in very condensed

form) by Malcolm Hayes in his *The Selected Letters of William Walton* that was published by Faber & Faber in 2002. The interested reader is referred to pages 274–313 and 411–20 of that publication, but nevertheless, the following facts need to be reported here.

A premiere at the 1956 Edinburgh Festival was unrealistic. However, Alan Frank was on the Council of the distinguished Royal Philharmonic Society, and on 12 December 1955 wrote to the General Manager of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra: ‘This is just to tell you, as I promised I would, that a letter is now on its way to Piatigorsky, inviting him to give the first English performance of Walton’s CELLO CONCERTO, in London, for the Royal Philharmonic Society on 13th February 1957’.<sup>28</sup> The RPS also acted on a hint from Piatigorsky, relayed to Frank by Walton, that he would appreciate the distinction of being made an Honorary Member of the Society at the same time, which indeed eventually happened. Piatigorsky, however, appears to have decided on an American premiere instead. On 17 March 1956 he wrote to Walton: ‘We now have a deadline to meet, viz. December 7th, when it will have its world premiere in Boston. I have just accepted invitation to play it in London January 29th. The first performance in New York will be with the New York Philharmonic, Mitropoulos, in May’.<sup>29</sup>

This news spurred Walton into action. Writing on 24 April 1956 to Alan Frank, he said: ‘I enclose the [cello and piano arrangement of the] 1st movement. Will you have it photostatted & the Vlc. part copied [...] Checking it over I find it rather good & wonder why I’ve had such difficulty with it as it’s really very simple and straightforward. Perhaps that’s why?’.<sup>30</sup> On receiving the photocopy, Piatigorsky replied by cable on 10 May: ‘First movement magnificent. Not a note to change. Thanks love Grisha’. He followed this up with a letter on 17 May in which he continued to enthuse about the first movement, and continued: ‘My new Stradivari [*sic*] is of such glorious quality that as a special request for his genius, I would love to have some solo spot for it in your Concerto, unmixed with any other instruments, in whatever form it be’. This request was to be granted twofold. Walton then immersed himself in the second movement. Piatigorsky suggested a number of alterations to the solo line, and on 10 August 1956 Walton wrote to him: ‘Here is what I hope is the final version—as far as it goes [up to fig. 19]. I’m in a hurry to send it off so that you can have it on your journey [i.e., tour of the Far East]. This new version I think incorporates all your suggestions for which many thanks. It is as you will quickly see very different from what I’ve already sent you, so please destroy the former version [...]. The cadenza can be played as freely as you like. I think I’ve covered most questions by

alternative versions’.<sup>31</sup>

On 9 September he reported to Piatigorsky: ‘After many false starts & what is worse nothing happening at all, I’m at last launched on the finale. It opens with a solo Vlc. all on its own quite a while. Very “robusto”.



I wo’nt send any more in case I change it! [Walton eventually entirely rethought this opening]. I think it will end quietly with a longish coda based on themes from the 1st mov. But we will see’.<sup>32</sup> There was much detailed discussion, especially about the two solo ‘improvisations’, and Walton was quite firm in reiterating his conviction that the quiet ending ‘rounds off the work in a satisfying & logical way and should sound beautiful, noble, dignified etc. though it ends on a whisper. Sometimes (& I hope this is one of them) an ending such as this one, is in every way just as impressive and evocative as a more spectacular & loud one, especially in this case, as I feel there is no other solution’.<sup>33</sup> On 26 October he told Piatigorsky ‘The score is now completely finished’, and on 4 November ‘It is to my mind, the best of my now, three concertos, but don’t say so to Jascha!’.<sup>34</sup> All this while, OUP had been arranging for the full score to be copied by Roy Douglas who, in the process, was able to spot mistakes; he also checked the transparencies of the orchestral parts that were being made at the same time.

### Performance

At this point, disaster struck on both sides of the Atlantic. First Piatigorsky, who had been quite ill in June and had just finished a particularly strenuous autumn tour, had a nervous breakdown; in consequence, the two scheduled first performances in Boston on 7 December (matinée) and 8 (evening) had to be cancelled. Fortunately it was possible to reschedule the first performance for 25 January 1957, when it was given in Symphony Hall by Piatigorsky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Charles Münch. This was fourteen days before the long-arranged British premiere under the auspices of the Royal Philharmonic Society. Walton and his wife decided to drive from Ischia to London to attend this important event (his first major orchestral concert work since the overture *Scapino* of 1940), but en route they were involved in a serious collision with a cement lorry just outside Rome. Walton was told that he would not be able to move for 40 days.

Despite this double setback, the British premiere went ahead as planned, with Piatigorsky and with Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the

Royal Festival Hall on 13 February 1957. Two days earlier, Piatigorsky had spent two hours with Roy Douglas at the Savoy Hotel discussing further alterations to the cello part; they were played by telephone to Walton in his Roman clinic and approved. The performance was broadcast and shown live on BBC TV, and Radio Italiana went out of its way to relay the performance, as the composer was still bedridden. The work was very well received by the press and public alike.

### Recording

Even before the European premiere, Piatigorsky had recorded the concerto for RCA Victor in Boston three days after the premiere there. Although delighted with what he had heard of Piatigorsky's playing in London, Walton had been troubled by the slow tempi and, in particular, those of the two unaccompanied improvisations in the third movement, which made it some three and a half minutes longer than the timings he had envisaged.<sup>35</sup> He was even more worried by this when he heard a test pressing of the RCA recording, and OUP in New York and London were faced with the delicate task of asking all those concerned if it would be possible for the improvisations to be re-recorded. When Piatigorsky agreed to this Walton, by now in London, arranged for Roy Douglas to make a tape of them at his preferred tempi. This was done on 20 March and sent to Piatigorsky in America. In a letter of the following day, Walton says: 'Neither [improvisations] 2 or 4 should be regarded as "cadenzas". No 2 in fact should wake up the whole movement! [...] Both 2 and 4 need to have the feeling of a beat (almost as if they were being conducted)'. Piatigorsky performed the concerto in New York on 3 and 5 May, and the re-recordings were planned for sometime that month. The recording was eventually released in June 1958, coupled with Bloch's *Schelomo*.<sup>36</sup>

OUP were keen to release the engraved study score in time for the performance of the concerto at the Proms on 21 August 1957, played by Piatigorsky's brilliant Danish pupil Erling Bengtsson. At the same time, the arrangement for cello and piano was in production. At an early stage in the concerto's composition Walton had asked Piatigorsky whether he would mind editing the solo part, in the same way that Heifetz had for the Violin Concerto. Eventually Alan Frank dissuaded him from pursuing this, saying: 'All our experience shows that solo performers tend to dislike edited parts, since they all have their own ideas'.<sup>37</sup> No editing was shown in the eventual publication, which bears the note: 'The composer is indebted to Roy Douglas for his help in the preparation of the piano reduction of this work'. Both publications eventually appeared in December of that year.

### Alternative endings

On 2 November 1956 Piatigorsky had cabled Walton: 'Entire concerto wonderful with deeply moving and only possible epilogue [...] Love, congratulations and thanks Grisha'.<sup>38</sup> However, during the period of recuperation from his nervous breakdown, the cellist seems to have reconsidered his former opinion, especially as Heifetz, to whom he had shown the new concerto before the premiere, suggested that the ending could be more intense, and that the second improvisation in the third movement could be shortened. Walton had responded to both comments. A letter of 31 December 1956 from Alan Frank to OUP's New York office says: 'I have a note today from Sir William saying that Piatigorsky was not entirely happy about the end. He therefore has written two new endings, and has sent them over, leaving it to Piatigorsky to choose the one he likes best and to send it to you'.<sup>39</sup> However, writing again to New York on 21 January, Frank said: 'As far as we can make out from a note from Walton [not preserved] Piatigorsky seems to have gone back to the first ending'.<sup>40</sup> No trace of these early alternative endings exists, and all performances and publications up until now have presented what Walton originally wrote.

But renewed contact between composer and player in the summer of 1974 emboldened Piatigorsky to ask Walton for a new piece, and later to request a new ending to the concerto. On 3 December of that year he wrote: 'I could not help wishing that the very conclusion of the Concerto, instead of resembling the mood of the ending of the first movement [,] would transform [*sic*] by your adding only a few bars the touching reminiscence, to a bright and ringing conclusion'. On 24 July Walton replied: 'Having looked at the 'Cello Concerto I feel a bit doubtful about that also. It may seem as if something had been stitched on, like adding a new hem to an old skirt! However, I will keep you informed'.<sup>41</sup> On 17 December Walton wrote again: 'I was so happy to receive your letter & to discover what you want for the new ending of the Concerto, but I'd got the wrong idea & thought you wished for a loud pyrotechnical ending, but your description of what you really want has been of the greatest help & I send a sketch of what I've done – but it's only a sketch & if it appeals to you I'll work it out properly'.<sup>42</sup>

On 6 February 1975 he wrote to Alan Frank: 'I've done a new end which I hope will be alright. I don't suppose P. will approve as it is to all purposes the same as the original – but he can't say I have'nt tried'.<sup>43</sup> On 25 February Walton replied to an enthusiastic cable from Piatigorsky: 'I'm most happy to learn that my new ending is more or less what you want. Why it bothered me so much I don't know'.<sup>44</sup> Sadly

Piatigorsky, who had been ill for some time, succumbed to cancer and died on 6 August 1976, without ever playing the new ending of the concerto. It is published for the first time here as Appendix II, and is included as an alternative in the matching orchestral parts. In these, any editorial amendments in the score of both concertos are shown in normal type.

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DAVID LLOYD-JONES  
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#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Letter to Siegfried Sassoon of 21 October 1935. Quoted in ed. Malcolm Hayes, *The Selected Letters of William Walton* (London, 2002), p. 101.
- <sup>2</sup> Spike Hughes, *Opening Bars* (London, 1946), p. 315.
- <sup>3</sup> OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 112.
- <sup>6</sup> For this, and the other quotations relating to the concerto and the World's Fair concerts, see the special British Council file, later donated to the OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>7</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 113.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- <sup>10</sup> Both Dora Foss letters are in the possession of Mrs. Diana Sparkes (née Foss).
- <sup>11</sup> H. Dawkes and J. Tooze, 'A conversation with Antonio Brosa', in *Royal College of Music Magazine* 65(1) Easter 1969, p. 10.
- <sup>12</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 118. The telegram, dated 28 Feb. 39, read: 'Accept enthusiastically your concerto however collaboration necessary please advise earliest [possible] date your arrival letter follows greetings Heifetz'. OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- <sup>15</sup> Memo of 15 June 1938. OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>16</sup> Heifetz Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- <sup>17</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 126.
- <sup>18</sup> Victor 18414-6, in album M-808; HMV DB 5953-5. Re-issued in CD format in 2000 by Naxos on 8.110939. Roy Douglas, doubtless repeating information supplied by Walton, claimed that Heifetz had a firm conviction that, commercially speaking, no concerto recording should ever occupy more than three 78rpm records, which goes some way to explaining his generally fast tempi.
- <sup>19</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, pp. 147-8.
- <sup>20</sup> Letter to Norman Peterkin of 25 September 1944. OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- <sup>22</sup> HMV DB 21257-9, released May 1951. Reissued as CD on RCA Victor GD 87966 in November 1988, and in the USA on album DM 1511 (78rpm), and LM 1121 (LP).
- <sup>23</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 389. HMV ASD 2542, released on LP

- in March 1970. Reissued as CD on CHS5 65003-2.
- <sup>24</sup> Ivor Newton, *At the Piano* (London, 1966), p. 128.
- <sup>25</sup> OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 269.
- <sup>28</sup> OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* There were four performances, May 2-5.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 274. There is a thick file in the OUP Archive, Oxford, which makes it possible to follow the Walton-Piatigorsky correspondence in great detail.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281 and 284.
- <sup>35</sup> Letter of Walton to Piatigorsky of 12 March 1957; see ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, pp. 295-6. Walton always had a very clear conception of the timings of his works; in a letter to Alan Frank of 26 October 1952, announcing the completion of the third movement, he says: 'It lasts about 11' - 12' so the total duration will be something between 24' - 26''. As the details listed below show, this is remarkably accurate. The timings of the three movements on the only recording of Walton conducting the concerto, a live performance on 23 August 1959 with Pierre Fournier and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Edinburgh Festival (BBCL 4098 - 2), are: I - 6.42, II - 6.04, III - 11.17, in all 24.03; these are probably the fastest ever. See Appendix 3 of Angela Hughes, *Pierre Fournier: Cellist in a landscape with figures* (Aldershot, 1998) for Walton's letter of 27 August 1958 to Fournier with his performing suggestions.
- <sup>36</sup> RCA RB 16027.
- <sup>37</sup> OUP Archive, Oxford.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> ed. Hayes, *Selected Letters*, p. 413.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 416.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 418.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419. Rafael Wallfisch, a pupil of Piatigorsky who gave him a copy of the 1975 revised ending, has performed it once in concert in Edmonton, Canada. It has been recorded by Jamie Walton on SIGCD220.