

Malcolm Arnold: Rogue Genius

by Anthony Meredith & Paul Harris
(published by Thames/Elkin, 530 pp, £29.99)

The chequered career of our distinguished Liveryman Sir Malcolm Arnold is compellingly recounted in this lively biography.

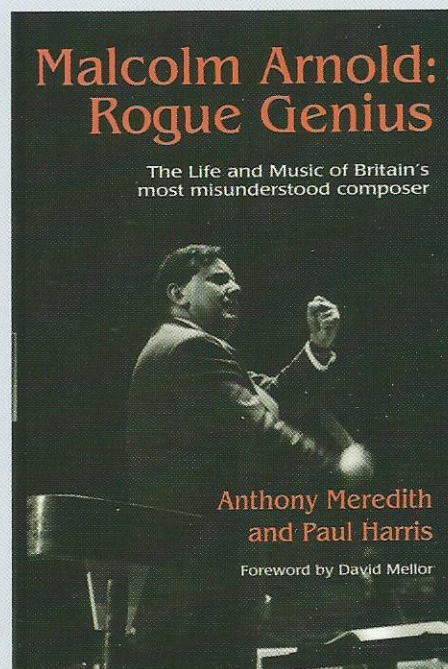
The Company's more senior members will doubtless remember Arnold's enormous popularity during the 1950s, when his music was widely heard in films, ballet, theatre and the classical concert hall, as well as on television and radio. Arnold won an Oscar for his score for the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. His was a household name.

Fifty years later, the writers feel that he has been unjustly forgotten, and that his nine symphonies (the most recent of which was composed in 1986) are of the highest quality. Rather than creating an analytical tome, they have decided to try to popularize Arnold's music by introducing its creator to a scandal-hungry twenty first-century public with something approaching a full tabloid exposé. The music is presented programmatically as a reflection of the composer's life.

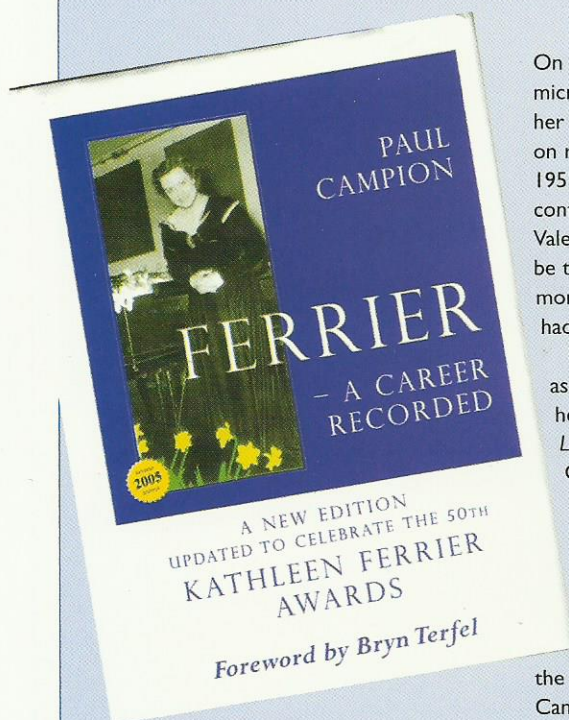
Whether or not one likes the gossipy style, or agrees that exact parallels

necessarily exist between a composer's music and his everyday life, there is no doubt that this is a meticulously researched biography which flows with an irresistible momentum. The composer's problems with manic depression and alcoholism are covered sympathetically but also with a light touch. Thus, the several examples of mental illness within the Arnold family are introduced with a vivid account of two eccentric aunts: Aunt Belle, a violin teacher, who filled her Austin Seven with vases full of flowers, and drove rather slowly, always in first gear; and Aunt Bess who presided like Miss Havisham in a dusty back parlour, feeding chicken to a smelly cairn terrier on her lap and offering sherry and Christmas cake to visitors even at the height of summer.

Arnold's sometimes outrageous behaviour and his sudden swings of mood are chronicled from the perspective of his family, friends and colleagues, and include some fairly raunchy anecdotes, particularly concerning the many women in his life. For anybody who requires them, the authors have also provided full details of his binge drinking, his breakdowns, attempted suicide and stays in psychiatric institutions. However, their attempts at amateur psychology are not very persuasive. They claim to be



convinced by the pronouncement of one learned Professor of Psychiatry that in artists the distinction between 'artistic temperament' and 'manic depressive illness' is a very fine one,



Ferrier - A Career Recorded

by Paul Campion
(published by Thames/Elkin 244 pp, £19.99)

On 30 June 1944 Kathleen Ferrier faced a microphone at EMI's Abbey Road studios and her incomparable contralto voice was captured on record for the first time. On 12 January 1953 Kathleen recorded a recital of contemporary British songs at the BBC's Maida Vale studios for later broadcast. This proved to be the end of her recording career; nine months later she succumbed to the cancer that had overshadowed her final years.

In that short span, as Kathleen's reputation as an international performer grew, much of her repertoire was recorded – Schubert *Lieder* and British folksongs; title roles in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*; Bach and Handel arias, posthumously recreated in stereo, and landmark recordings of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*; Brahms' *Four Serious Songs* and four frivolous songs at a private party.

In all, over 200 recorded items comprise the rich legacy that is the subject of Paul Campion's discography.

Since publication of the first edition in 1992, many new recordings have been unearthed and published, and the author has continued to gather and collate new material. Accordingly,

this new edition is substantially revised and expanded.

If the idea of a discography suggests a catalogue of dry facts and figures, do not be misled, for this record of recordings is an absorbing account. The author's knowledge is comprehensive and he documents it here in thoroughly readable style.

The longer Part I relates Kathleen's sadly curtailed recording career in a chronology of studio sessions, concert broadcasts and off-air recordings, each covered in a separate entry. In each entry facts, circumstances and background details are woven into a narrative enlivened by anecdotes, quotations from diaries and correspondence, and photographs. Excursions into the life and times of the singer and her fellow-musicians, questions and controversies surrounding some recordings, and discoveries of unknown recordings (with news of forthcoming releases of the latest of these) add zest to the story. But, we also learn about notable gaps in Kathleen's recorded repertoire – Handel's *Messiah* that should have been and Elgar's *Gerontius* that must remain a dream – and we can only speculate hopefully about what else might yet turn up in attics and archives.