



**Go to jail: the Royal Marines' music school makes wonderful use of the old naval prison at Portsmouth, with individual "cells" for student musicians' practice, study and music storage. Ensemble rehearsal and the repair and refurbishment of musical instruments was also on the agenda on the mid-summer day of the Musicians' visit**



## CD Review

### BRASS HIGHLIGHTS FROM SYMPHONY HALL

**Quincentenary Concert**

**Grimethorpe Colliery RJB Band (Garry Cutt)**

**Yorkshire Building Society Band (David King)**

**Guest Conductor: Elgar Howarth**

**Polyphonic QPRL 207D**

**Available from the Company office, £11.84 inc p&p**

Liveryman Peter Wilson writes Those who missed the great feast of brass at Birmingham's Symphony Hall last year can now catch the flavour of one of the highlights of the Company's 500th anniversary celebrations, thanks to this impressive 73-minute CD – produced by Liveryman Stan Kitchen.

Grimethorpe Colliery RJB and Yorkshire Building Society bands are as different as chalk and cheese: the former rugged and majestic, the latter scintillating, smooth as silk. When combined under the authoritative baton of Elgar Howarth to top and tail this CD, the result is a blaze of sound that warms the heart and stirs the soul. *Ovation*, the celebratory prelude by Liveryman Martin Ellerby commissioned for the concert by Pastmaster John Iles, sets the scene beautifully. A colourful, happy kaleidoscope of sound, it is perfectly tailored to the occasion.

What follows is a fitting reminder of the contribution to banding made by Pastmaster John Henry Iles, whose relentless commissioning of testpieces for the National Brass Band Championships – perhaps his greatest legacy – produced the core of today's brass band repertoire.

*Life Divine*, written by Cyril Jenkins for the 1921 National Finals at Crystal Palace, has long been a favourite, its seemingly impossible technical demands on the players of yesteryear well within the grasp of today's best bands. In this performance, Elgar Howarth endows the work with a grandeur it seldom enjoys, treating its romantic middle section with sensitivity where sentimentality often prevails.

No band programme seems complete without a march, and those by William Rimmer (a sort of brass-band Sousa) are as fine as they come. *Salome*, used in the concert as an encore, might be virtually unknown to today's band audiences, but it goes with a swing and is typical of the genre.

In recent years, under David King's dynamic leadership, YBS has acquired an enviable reputation for enterprising programming, with an emphasis on entertainment. Responding to the dignity of this unique occasion, the band adopted a slightly different tack, inviting Edward Watson to put together a sequence of music, partly original and partly drawn from the tradition of British folk song and dance.

Titled *This Sceptred Isle*, the work has many attractive moments, some of them included among the extracts on this disc. The band's playing is of a high order throughout – listen to its ravishing soft sounds in *The Death of Arthur*, and decide for yourself.

To open its solo slot, Grimethorpe chose Pastmaster Frank Wright's transcription of the Berlioz overture *Le Carnaval Romain*. Together with Wagner's *The Ride of the Valkyries* and Ray Farr's transcription of Malcolm Arnold's *Four Scottish Dances*, it provides evidence to the uninitiated of the ability of the brass band to tackle music from the orchestral and operatic worlds.

And if further proof be needed, it comes in the CD's magnificent finale – two movements from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. *The Hut on Fowl's Legs* – *Baba Yaga* and *The Great Gate of Kiev*, arranged for brass by Elgar Howarth, are given superb treatment by bands and conductor, rounding off a disc that is not only a faithful memento of a special occasion but an enjoyable listening experience too.