

London; 20 June 2017

Twin Peaks: The Drama of Early Stereo (red-hot revelations) was the intriguing title of Simon Heighes' programme. He began with a hymn, a robust recording of *Oh God, our Help in Ages Past* with a promise that we would return to it later.

The programme was structured in three parts. First, a reminder that there is nothing new about stereo and that it has long been the practice to position choirs and other ensembles in such a way that the sound comes from two places (antiphony). We heard recordings of some terrific examples taken from the Florentine *Intermedii* (1589), Monteverdi's *Vespers* (1610) and the *Missa Salisburgensis* (seven choirs including two trumpet choirs) written for Salzburg Cathedral in 1682 - a monster of the baroque. Simon's knowledge and passion for this music is such that it was more than usually easy to be swept up and carried away by it. We continued with Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, a recording made in 1988 leading nicely to a reminder that there is a cylinder of 4,000 voices in the Crystal Palace singing the same piece a hundred years earlier. We heard a little of that too.

Part two of the programme concentrated on experimental stereo recordings made, often in difficult conditions, by Bob Gooch and Chris Parker in the 1950s. Fragments of these have recently come to light. We heard extracts of some thrilling performances: works by Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Richard Strauss, the latter a recording of *Till Eulenspiegel* from the LSO under Norman Del Mar - probably its first public airing.

And so to the revelations. That opening hymn was fairly obviously a stereo recording but when was it recorded? It sounded too good for the 1930s and probably not good enough for the 1950s. The answer was February 1928. There are photographs of Elgar conducting in the recording studio which clearly show two recording microphones. The theory is that one recording was a back-up which would have been discarded later. But (and this is why we should never throw anything away) it seems that Elgar often kept both copies. Through the miracle of modern technology some of these twin recordings of single performances have been combined to produce what has been termed 'accidental stereo'. We heard some of Beatrice Harrison's 1928 recording of the *Cello Concerto* first in mono and then in accidental stereo and we finished in irresistible style with the *Cockaigne Overture* from April 1933.

There is likely to be more on these revelations in due course in the written and broadcast media – something to look out for!

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