

**William Walton (1902-1983) Three Songs (arr 1931-2 from *Façade*, 1922)**

*Daphne*

*Through gilded trellises*

*Fox-Trot: Old Sir Faulk*

After an early childhood in Oldham singing in his father's church choir, the ten year-old William Walton won a choral scholarship to Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford; he and his mother had arrived late for the auditions after his father had drunk their train fare. At Oxford he began to compose, in order, he said, to avoid having to return home. In 1918, aged 16 he was admitted to the university thanks to the support of Thomas Strong the Dean of Christ Church, but left without a degree two years later, after failing the obligatory Greek and Algebra exams three times. Much of his time had been spent in the library studying scores by Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev and Stravinsky. At Oxford he met the Sitwell siblings Sacheverell, Osbert and Edith, who housed him in the attic of their London home, and gave him a cultural education. He met Stravinsky and Gershwin, won the praise of Alban Berg for a string quartet, and listened to jazz at the Savoy. In 1920 he went with the Sitwells to Italy, whose music and sunshine captivated the Oldham boy and inspired the music of *Façade*.

At *Façade*'s public premiere in 1923, Edith declaimed her verses through a megaphone from behind a screen, while Walton conducted a six-piece ensemble in what the *Manchester Guardian* denounced as a "relentless cacophony". Noel Coward ostentatiously walked out. The clarinettist asked Walton "has a clarinet player ever done you an injury?". Edward Dent writing for the *Illustrated London News* was more perceptive: "*The audience was at first inclined to treat the whole thing as an absurd joke, but there is always a surprisingly serious element in Miss Sitwell's poetry and Mr Walton's music ... which soon induced the audience to listen with breathless attention.*" They still do.

*Façade* underwent a number of changes: in the 1970s Walton added eight new numbers in *Façade Revived* and made further changes in 1979 to produce *Façade II*. He also composed two *Façade* suites (1926, 1938) for a larger orchestra which Günter Hess and Frederick Ashton used in their ballets. The arrangements for sung voice and piano that we hear today were made by Walton in 1931-1932 and are dedicated to his publisher Hubert Foss and his wife Dora who gave the first performance.