



BLISS - HOPKINS

Tobias & the Angel - Hands Across the Sky



Sir Arthur Bliss's opera *Tobias and the Angel* was commissioned by BBC Television and it was first seen in a live telecast on 19 May 1960, its only production, the performance reissued here. The libretto is by Christopher Hassall – after the Apocryphal *Book of Tobit* – who sets the story in two acts. The score is dedicated to Trudy Bliss by the composer and the author. Bliss was probably best known for his pioneering ballet scores *Checkmate*, *Miracle in the Gorbals* and *Adam Zero*, and his film music for *Things to Come*. His varied catalogue of orchestral works spans more than fifty years from *A Colour Symphony* of 1921-2, to the *Metamorphic Variations* of 1972 as well as concertos for piano and violin. His choral music is crowned by his First World War memorial to lost comrades, *Morning Heroes*, and his chamber music includes memorable oboe and clarinet quintets and two string quartets. As Master of the Queen's Music after 1954 his occasional works and fanfares for royal occasions are iconic. His three-act opera *The Olympians*, seen at Covent Garden in 1949, and his version of *The Beggar's Opera* produced for a film released in 1953 are all that precede this television opera for the operatic stage.

Antony Hopkins CBE was long known to a wide audience for his BBC Radio series 'Talking About Music' in which, notable for the ease and informality of his delivery, each week he analyzed a major work from the repertoire, illustrated at the piano. The series ran for nearly forty years – over a thousand scripts – and survives as a series of published guides to the repertoire. He enjoyed a long association with the Intimate Opera Company, presenting a variety of chamber operas, many of them newly composed. His operas include *Lady Robesia* (1948), *Three's Company* (1954), and the work recorded here. *Hands Across the Sky* was first produced at the Cheltenham Festival on 8 July 1959 and on BBC television on 7 February 1960. Hopkins celebrated his 90th birthday in 2012.

Notes by Lewis Foreman - full notes on both works can be found online and are enclosed with all downloads

Producer's Note

These two remarkable productions originate from the archives of Lewis Foreman, who has generously provided both the recordings and his own notes, as well as offering invaluable help with tracking and annotating the works. Of the two, the Bliss is the less-well preserved, though for live TV sound of this era it's still remarkably good. A lot of work has gone into getting as clean, full and clear a sound as possible here, and despite a lack of very high treble and some peak top-end distortion (largely tamed), it has come out very well. This is the only known recording and performance of this work. Antony Hopkins' *Hands Across the Sky* came from a BBC Transcription disc which delivered much better sound quality - clean, crisp and with an excellent frequency range. Although one title from the opera has appeared on recent compilations of the composer's music, we can find no other recording of the complete work. It seems doubtful that any video images remain of either TV broadcast. **Andrew Rose**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
SARL Pristine Audio, 144 Rue de l'Eglise, 24610 St. Méard de Gurçon, France



BLISS - HOPKINS

Two 1960 Operas for BBC TV



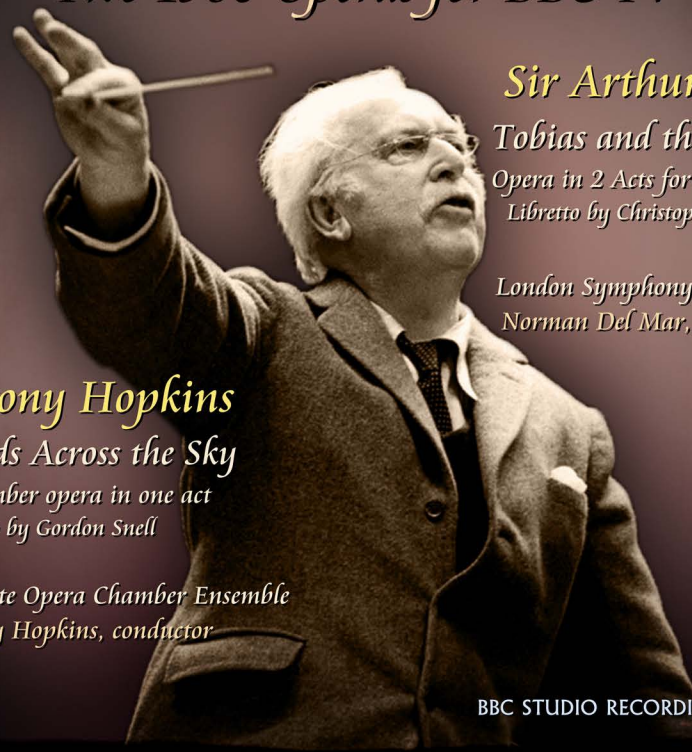
Sir Arthur Bliss
Tobias and the Angel
Opera in 2 Acts for Television
Libretto by Christopher Hassall

London Symphony Orchestra
Norman Del Mar, conductor

Antony Hopkins
Hands Across the Sky
A chamber opera in one act
Libretto by Gordon Snell

Intimate Opera Chamber Ensemble
Antony Hopkins, conductor

BBC STUDIO RECORDINGS, 1960



- 1 BLISS Tobias and the Angel - Prelude (0:58)
- 2 Act I scene i: Nineveh: The Market Square (6:00)
- 3 Tobias hires a man (2:44)
- 4 Act I scene ii: The door of a poor man's dwelling - Tobit and Anna (2:01)
- 5 Tobit: 'Anna, Anna - the sun is setting later today' (0:55)
- 6 Azarius: 'My name is Azarius' (2:12)
- 7 'Azarius: 'There lies the way' (2:43)
- 8 Act I scene iii: The river bank (2:06)
- 9 Tobias's indecision: Tobias and Azarius 'Supposing' (0:47)
- 10 Azarius: 'You are free to turn back!' (1:14)
- 11 Tobias is dragged down by a fish - Azarius tells him how to catch it (5:56)
- 12 Act I scene iv: (orchestra) The embattled city of Ecbatane - Raguel's garden (0:46)
- 13 Sara and her women. Rezia: 'Where have you been, O tall ship of Sidon?' (3:35)
- 14 Rhezia: 'Who's a swindle? Who's a fraud?' (0:50)
- 15 Sara challenges Tobias - Tobias and Azarius: 'Who are you?' (1:25)
- 16 Tobias states his name and is recognised by Raguel (2:54)
- 17 Tobias and Sara 'When you open your eyes' (4:16)
- 18 Raguel warns Tobias of an evil spirit possessing Sara 'Now drink, young man' (5:12)
- 19 Act II Prelude and scene i: Sara's bedchamber and the adjoining terrace (4:31)
- 20 Drinking song (1:20)
- 21 Azarius encourages Tobias and tells him what to do (4:30)
- 22 Tobias turns to Sara's door - Trio - Sara calls - Raguel urges Tobias to leave (3:18)
- 23 Knocking - 'Who is that knocking?' - enter Azarius (2:31)
- 24 'That man has bewitched you' - Sara becomes Asmoday (1:13)
- 25 (orchestra) Tobias places the fragments on the burner (4:42)
- 1 Act II: scene ii: The next morning. It is gradually brightening with dawn (3:56)
- 2 Sara and Tobias: 'I was asleep' (3:24)
- 3 Azarias: 'Master, we have lingered too long' (3:13)
- 4 Act II: scene iii: Prelude - The market at Nineveh - Tobias buys his parents (7:38)
- 5 HOPKINS Hands Across The Sky - Announcement - Narration (0:37)
- 6 Orchestral introduction; Professor Neutron and Miss Fothergill ('Science is my Passion') (8:19)
- 7 Narrator describes the entry of Squeg, a Thing (5:40)
- 8 Narrator describes effect of Squeg on Miss Fothergill (Miss Fothergill: 'I love Squeg') (2:34)
- 9 Entry of Squag looking Sad - Miss Fothergill: 'Squeg dear Squeg, lets fly away together' (4:32)
- 10 Professor Neutron broods on the loss of Miss Fothergill to Squeg, plans a lethal potion (3:48)
- 11 Miss Fothergill returns with her plan to devise a potion to make her look like Squeg (2:22)
- 12 Professor Neutron and Miss Fothergill: 'Hello Miss Fothergill' - 'Hello Professor' (3:51)
- 13 Professor Neutron: 'I hope you'll consider an alternative bidder' (4:18)
- 14 Miss Fothergill laments the loss of Squeg ('I loved my loved') (3:00)
- 15 The Professor now has a green skin and a pair of horns - 'It's rather odd' (3:43)
- 16 Final announcement (0:19)

BLISS Tobias and the Angel

First performance: Trevor Anthony (Bozru), Carolyn Maia (Rhezia), John Ford (Tobias), Ronald Lewis (Azarias), Jess Walters (Tobit), Janet Howe (Anna), Richard Golding (Raguel), Elaine Malbin (Sara), Roy Patrick (Asmoday), William Lyon-Brown (Beggart). Electronic sounds by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Special effects: Jack Kine and Bernard Wilkie. Producer: Rudolf Cartier. Associate conductor and chorus master Brian Priestman. London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Norman Del Mar. BBC Television, 19 May 1960.

HOPKINS Hands Across the Sky

Eric Shilling (Professor neutron), Ann Dowdall (Miss Fothergill, his Assistant); Stephen Manton (Squeg, a Thing); Intimate Opera Chamber Ensemble conducted by Antony Hopkins. Narrator: Richard Baker. Scene: Professor Neutron's Laboratory; Time: The near future. Recording: BBC ca 1960

Total duration: **2hr 9:53**

XR remastering by
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based
on a photograph
of **Sir Arthur Bliss**

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