

## Music Reflection

### *Strength and Stay*

Most of us have been saddened over the past few days by the death of Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh. I recognise of course that His Royal Highness was a very old man who was never going to be immortal and who had lived a good and full life but my sadness, which I know is shared by many, is for Her Majesty and her family who will inevitably be mourning the loss of a much-loved husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather who has meant so much to them all. We as a nation owe a great debt of gratitude to Prince Philip for his service to this country and the commonwealth, in the armed forces, the many charities and organisations he headed or encouraged and of course his immeasurable support to Her Majesty and the whole institution of the Monarchy. There have been thousands upon thousands of words spoken and written in recent days praising the life and work of Prince Philip but the sum of them all is really as nothing compared to the three words used by the Queen when, on their Golden Wedding Anniversary, she described him as her “Strength and Stay” – I can add nothing other than to pray; ‘May he rest in peace and rise in glory’

My musical suggestions this week are based upon aspects on the life of The Duke of Edinburgh.

As everyone must know by now, Prince Philip was born in the Palace of ‘Mon Repos’ located in a large park in Corfu Town. Ironically the palace was built in 1826 by the British Commissioner and was the official residence of the British Governors of Ionian Islands until they were reunited with Greece in 1864 at which point ‘Mon Repos’ was given as a gift to King George I of Greece. If you have visited Corfu, you will know that the palace stands within sound of the sea so let us listen to some **Ancient Greek Music** with the sea providing the background

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FGzi6iW06E>

Although (correctly) described as a Greek Prince, Prince Philip was exiled with his parents at the age of 18 months and spoke no Greek nor indeed had any Greek blood in his veins. The Prince’s father was a Prince of Denmark invited to become King of Greece and his mother a mix of Russian and German royal ancestry. The Prince was therefore in reality more a Prince of Denmark rather than a Greek Prince so it seems appropriate for us to listen to **“The Prince of Denmark’s March”** by Jeremiah Clarke (1674-1707). Clarke who wrote this march around 1700 was a pupil of Dr John Blow at St. Pauls and later became an organist and Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. For many years until the middle of the last century, the very popular march along with some other pieces was wrongly attributed to Purcell. Sadly, Clarke fell in love with a young lady pupil who was well above his social station and the matter ended badly with his suicide in 1707. The march is played here by Jonathan Scott on the magnificent Forster and Andrews organ in Hull Town Hall, Hull was the home town of the well-known early 20<sup>th</sup> century builders Forster and Andrews.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3-rkkcVxp0>

Prince Philip had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy during WWII and during the early years of his marriage to Princess Elizabeth. Following his wife’s accession to the throne the Prince’s career was curtailed but of course he maintained close links to all of the armed services including in latter years as Lord High Admiral to the Navy and as Captain General to the Royal Marines. It therefore seems appropriate to listen to the Band of HM Royal Marines as they play three pieces including **“A Life on the Ocean Wave”**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXXC68aNyPs>

The song **“Rule Britannia”** is synonymous with Britain’s naval history and the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts where it has been a regular feature for many years. In recent times the Imperial connotations of the song have caused suggestions to be made that it is unsuitable for public performance but fortunately wiser counsels have prevailed. “Rule Britannia” is the final chorus in a masque called ‘Alfred’ composed by Thomas Arne in 1740 for Frederick Prince of Wales.

The masque was restyled as an opera in 1753 and is set in Isle of Athelney, Somerset, it revolves around the doings of King Alfred the Great following a defeat at the hand of the Vikings. After a large number of volunteers come to the aid of Alfred and the nation, this results in the defeat of the Vikings and much rejoicing involving the singing of "Rule Britannia". Thomas Arne (1710-1778) was destined to be a lawyer but his father was sympathetic to his wish to pursue a career in music, he composed mainly for the stage and because he was a Roman Catholic produced nothing for the Church in this country.

There is something of a contradiction here in using a work which celebrates a victory over the Vikings to honour the memory of a Prince with Danish ancestry but of course the man in question did become a rather well-respected British citizen. The following link will take you to a recording of the whole of the 1753 setting performed here by Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoYrquEi25s>

Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip were married in Westminster Abbey on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1947 using the same service as would have been used by any couple being joined according to the rite of the Church of England on that day – the surroundings at Westminster were just a little more grand than some but the promises equally binding and honoured for 73 years. The music for the wedding was sung by the Abbey Choir augmented by the Choristers of the Chapel Royal and St. George's Windsor – there were 91 singers in all. The music included the Introit "***We wait for thy loving kindness O God***" composed by William McKie the Organist and Master of the Choristers, as well as ***Ps 67 "God be merciful unto us and bless us"*** (Deus Misereatur) set to Bairstow's exquisite chant in Eb.

Unfortunately, the quality of the sound on the Pathe' News live recording of the 1947 ceremony is very poor so I have used the recordings made by the Abbey Choir at the service to celebrate the couple's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOV3v6mtraA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xivcCyXa-Zc>

And to conclude I return to those words used by Her Majesty in describing Prince Philip -"Strength and Stay" These words were originally used By Saint Ambrose in the Latin hymn 'Rerum Deus tenax vigor', translated into an English hymn by John Ellerton and set to music by the Rev. Dr J B Dykes.

***"O Strength and Stay"*** is sung here by the Choir of St. Paul's Cathedral – I cannot think of a more fitting note on which to end this reflection

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s1zTmNNm7I>

Keith Day