

La Fanfare Wagnérienne

*(The Extraordinary Lost
Collection of Paul Gilson)*



Guildhall Brass
Eric Crees

World Première



Paul Gilson ‘La Fanfare Wagnérienne’

Fantasie (1894) Fackelzug (Torch-lit Procession) (1899) Variations Symphoniques (1903)
Scherzo Fantastique (1906) Rapsodie & Fantazijstuck (1906) Rapsodie (1908-1909)

Brass players have long bemoaned the lack of substantial, original romantic ensemble music for their instruments. This dearth is surprising given the invention of a whole group of mellow sounding, relatively easy to play instruments with a range from contrabass to soprano by the Belgian genius Adolphe Sax (1814-94) between 1842 and 1845. These ‘saxhorns’ were to form the basis of the brass band and with the newly valved trumpets, horns and already chromatic trombones, presented composers with a tempting gamut of technically efficient instruments. The most popular of the saxhorns was the cornet, often used by orchestral composers as a duo alongside two natural and later valved trumpets, especially in the French and Russian schools. Curiously, the saxhorns failed to fire the imagination of contemporary composers sufficiently in order to inspire them to write original large scale ensemble music. The quintets written by the dilettante Russian Victor Ewald (1860-1935) and the five modest septets by the Finnish Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) were very much the exception rather than the rule.

In Germany the instruments were largely eschewed, perhaps because of their softer timbre. Wagner’s solution in the ‘Ring Cycle’, in order to expand his lofty musical aspirations, was to add four Wagner Tubas (middle range with a firmer sound than horns or saxhorns) a bass trumpet (one octave lower than the conventional trumpet), a contrabass trombone (pushing the trombones’ range downward) and a contrabass tuba, giving extra weight and much need support to the sixteen instruments now sitting above it.

It came as something of a surprise to discover from a Belgian colleague Luc Vertommen, that there was in fact a mightily substantial body of music by fellow countryman Paul Gilson (1865-1942) inspired not by Sax, but by the Wagnerian model and that it had been unperformed in its original format since 1912 – a ‘missing link’ in brass music ! The ‘*Fanfare Wagnérienne*’ was formed in 1894 at the Brussels Music Conservatory and was conducted by Henri Séha (1860-1941) trombone professor and principal for 25 years in the Orchestre de La Monnaie, Belgium’s most prestigious opera house. Gilson was an established and prolific composer who had already won the Belgian

‘Prix de Rome’ with his cantata ‘Sinai’ in 1889 and who was appointed Professor of Harmony at the conservatoires of both Brussels in 1899 and in Antwerp in 1904. He also wrote a most distinguished orchestral ‘La Mer’ 13 years before Debussy. His musical influences were Wagner himself and the Russian School of ‘*The Five*’. He had a long correspondence with Cesar Cui (1835-1918) and met both Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) and Scriabin (1872-1915).

Between 1894 and 1909, Gilson wrote six substantial pieces for the ‘*Fanfare Wagnérienne*’, all beautifully crafted and of an original and diverse style, the longest being the ‘*Variations*’, lasting 20 minutes. To give this some historic context, the first original brass band composition of any real substance came in 1913, with Percy Fletcher’s ‘*Labour and Love*’, written for the Crystal Palace Championships.

I examined the original scores (there being no existing parts), was immensely impressed by the quality and decided to make a performing edition. This essentially notated the pieces into modern notation, whilst clearing up inconsistencies of instrumentation, dynamics, articulation, speeds and obvious wrong notes. The task was somewhat herculean, but I feel that these original and fascinating pieces will soon be standard repertoire for brass players.....if you can find the special Wagnerian instruments! I must thank Luc Vertommen for introducing me to this repertoire and giving helpful advice, Guildhall School alumnus and former student Geoff Batchelor for computer-setting these performing editions with such skilful insight and Richard Benjafield, Head of Wind, Brass and Percussion, for his continuous support in this project. Finally, I am indebted to the Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama for their financial help in making the distribution of this music and recording possible.

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If there is an underlying characteristic for the listener to grasp in Gilson’s music, it is the rhythmic and melodic contrasts and transformations, often subtle but frequently disarmingly abrupt and surprising.

The opening dotted motif of the **Scherzo Fantastique** (1906) is immensely striking and dominates the powerful first section. Low *misterioso* phrases in the tubas precede an accelerando to a nimble *pp* triple time which is the true *scherzo* of the piece, with the unexpected accents and dynamic

contrasts providing the ‘fantastic’ quality of the title. A delicate major key section and five bar *diminuendo* on a muted horn return us to the opening fanfare for eleven bars, but the music is off again to a much more assertive fast coda with the dotted theme in its newly metamorphosed state driving to a thrilling finish.

Torchlit processions are perhaps a more common cultural expression of European rather than British culture and the unison triple time rhythms of the **Fackelzug** (1899) powerfully convey the heavy tread of a large body of people in festive mood. The more reflective middle section features the horn section beautifully, but more agitated music suddenly appears, led by the interchange of a strong rising and falling motif introduced by the trombones. The music subsides to a disquieting single-note rhythm on the horns building inexorably to an almost excessively grand (as one contemporary critic noted) climax.

The tentatively melancholic opening of the 1906 **Rapsodie & Fantazijstuck** could hardly be in greater contrast to the bombast of the previous piece; but a cheeky trumpet melody accelerating to exciting horn swoops show us a typical Gilsonian transformation from darkness into light and in true rhapsodic fashion, the piece meanders moodily onwards, eventually almost disappearing into quiet, distant chords. However, the chirpy tune reappears and the almost grim rhythmic solidity of the minor key music which follows, is finally turned into a brilliant major flourish.

In the original score of the *Fantazijstuck*, underneath the first three notes of the E flat trumpet part, Gilson writes “Es Muss Sein!” (“It Must Be!”). This is a quote from the opening of the last movement of Beethoven’s 16th String Quartet Op.135 subtitled “Der schwer gefasste Entschluss” (“The difficult [or weighty] decision”) and a reply to the curiously interrogative “Muss es sein?” (“Must it be?”). The notes are paraphrased at the opening, but quoted directly at the beginning of the ensuing ‘polacca’ (polka) where Beethoven’s assertion is reflected in the bold and forthright quality of the writing. The *polacca* in fact is the main theme of a rondo form; it features two contrasting middle sections, one a calm chorale (albeit with trumpet interjections), the other a fast nine-eight scherzo of constant quaver movement with everybody (except the tubas) muted. One of the great colourful moments in the piece occurs when all the instruments suddenly remove their mutes, giving an explosion of sound before the music broadens into the final statement of the polka, which is cleverly transformed by the triplets of the scherzo. The furious coda has the chorale blazing

triumphantly over virtuosic semiquavers in the trumpets and Wagner tubas.

In 1894, at 29 years of age, Gilson wrote the **Fantaisie**, his first work for brass. Strangely, although scored with the usual Wagnerian accoutrements of bass trumpet, contrabass trombone and Wagner and contrabass tubas, there are no french horns, which he included in all of the other pieces. It opens gently in three-four, then a faster rising motif in the trombones becomes the main theme of the ‘animated and rhythmic’ middle section. The opening returns, but lower down in the Wagner tubas, giving the listener an excellent illustration of the instrument’s timbre. An unexpected and powerful chromatic acceleration swiftly subsides giving way to slower soft, high trumpet chords; but the climbing theme immediately reappears and the finish shows that even in his inaugural piece for the ensemble, Gilson can fashion a powerful ending.

With the 1903 **Variations Symphoniques** we surely have evidence of a composer not only supremely confident in writing for brass, but with a fully mature, self-assured musical style. Similar to Brahms’ ‘Haydn Variations’, written thirty years earlier, Gilson presents a theme (although in this case an original one, unaccompanied and of a simple almost folk-like character with a rising fourth and falling third), eight variations and a finale. Although we cannot make a direct comparison (and not to diminish the brass band repertoire of the era), Gilson’s musical breadth and scope are far ahead of the operatic, dance and march based transcriptions that dominated brass band performance at the time (even the renowned Cyfarthfa Band). These ‘Variations’ and his other pieces arguably surpass even the more substantial original pieces that followed starting with Percy Fletchers’ *Labour and Love* in 1913 and for some time after. Not only are the individual variations cleverly crafted and contrasted, but the way Gilson skilfully structures the piece to emphasise the sublime ‘slow movement’ (the deeply moving and almost Mahlerian 8th variation) before the exuberance of the finale, is the sign of a visionary master craftsman.

Gilson’s last piece, his **Rhapsodie**, written between 1908-9 is very much the apotheosis of his work, with extremely hair-raising contrasts of speed and style which push the musicians (and conductor!) to their rhythmic and musical limits. Apart from the many *accelerandi* and *ralletandi*, there are also three main tempi specified by the composer. Opening with a stern theme which features a downward fall of a diminished seventh with similar quirky intervals abounding, it is quickly followed by an heroic melody in the horn and bass trumpet, which uncannily foreshadows the opening of the

fifth symphony of Sibelius (written six years later in 1915...). This theme is developed in true symphonic style, abruptly giving way to an energetic fanfare which precedes a delightfully witty, gentle, tongue-in cheek tune for seven bars, before roaring off into an almost burlesque romp. Further analysis is fairly pointless, but suffice it to say that the piece is *extremely* rhapsodic and almost wilfully wayward. Although the listener will recognise the main themes throughout, Gilson throws in a few others for good measure and true to form, the ending is inevitably flamboyantly brilliant.

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Paul Gilson, Music for ‘La Fanfare Wagnérienne’

‘Le travail et le culte de la musique pour elle-même, c’est encore le meilleur moyen d’en obtenir quelque satisfaction.’ (*‘The work and the worship of music for itself is still the best means of obtaining satisfaction from it.’*) Quotation from Paul Gilson stamped on the cover page of the *Fackelzug* dated the 5th of February 1913.

As an editing principle, the aim has been to enhance and clarify Gilson’s vision and to make it clear and practical for performance by 21st century musicians.

Editorial Procedure for the Eric Crees Performing Edition

This full procedure is available online as a separate document on the Musical Concepts website
www.musicalconcepts.net

Includes descriptions of all aspects and methods for performance for each instrumental group ie

**Instrumentation - Horns - Wagner Tubas - Trumpets - Bass Trumpet - Trombones -
Tubas - Percussion - Notational methodology – Accidentals/wrong notes –
Speeds/expression marks - Articulation**

Scores and parts of this edition are available from:
**C/o Co-ordinate, Dept. of Wind, Brass and Percussion, Guildhall School of Music Silk Street,
London EC2Y 8DT (UK) +44(0)20 7628 2571 Fax +44(0) 7256 9438**

Eric Crees was born in London and studied at Wandsworth School, where, in the famous boys choir, he worked with many distinguished professional orchestras and conductors. Of particular importance was the school's long association with Benjamin Britten, who wrote a solo part for him in the *Children's Crusade*.

While still at school he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and as a student undertook an extensive period of work with the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. Having won the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society's "Joyce Dixey Award" for composition, he graduated from the University of Surrey with first class honours and joined the London Symphony Orchestra, where he spent 27 years, twenty as Co-Principal Trombone.

As director of London Symphony Orchestra Brass for many years he regularly conducted them at the Barbican Centre and internationally. He made five CDs with the ensemble: two originally for Collins Classics, *American Brass* and *Cathedral Brass*, (re-released as *American Brass ALC 1209* and *Sacred Brass ALC 1027* on Alto) featuring many of his arrangements, others also available on *LSO Live* and three by Naxos Records of the complete instrumental ensemble sonatas and canzonas of Giovanni Gabrieli, for which he made a new performing edition.

In September 2000 he was appointed Principal Trombone at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Since joining Covent Garden, he has directed the Royal Opera House Brass Soloists in concert at the Floral Hall to great critical success and made two recordings, *On The Town* and *The Twelve days of Christmas* for Brass Classics. He has also written acclaimed arrangements for *The London Trombone Sound* and *The London Horn Sound*, for Cala Records, and has worked for many of the world's most distinguished ensembles and brass bands in concerts, recordings, television and radio broadcasts. His symphonic brass version of Bernstein's *Suite from West Side Story* has been commercially recorded four times (recommended: L.S.O Brass on alto ALC 1209 'American Brass'). Three of his arrangements are also featured on a CD by Chicago Symphony Brass on CSO Live.

Recent original compositions include *Silk Street Stomp* written for the Guildhall School of Music Big Band and played at a festival of youth big bands at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, *Two Antiphonal Fanfares* performed at the Lord Mayor's banquet at the Mansion House, *Frighteners' Gallop* for 8 horns commissioned by the British Horn Society, *Orage* for 16 trombones written for Bone Lab

and premiered at the Dartington Summer School, *The Birth of Conchobar* for symphonic brass and percussion for the Ulster Youth Orchestra, *Three Sketches from Rackham* for flute and harp, *Flourish* for solo trombone and *Carillons* for six harps for the Royal Academy of Music Harp Ensemble. In order to develop and extend his work for the large ensemble, he has formed *The Symphonic Brass of London*, a hand-picked group of Britain's finest brass and percussion players.

Eric is also an internationally renowned teacher and is Professor of Trombone, B.Mus. course tutor, Conductor of Wind, Brass and Percussion, and arranging and composing lecturer at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he was made a Fellow in 1991. He is a frequent coach at music colleges and specialist schools both in the UK and abroad as well as the National Youth Orchestras of Great Britain, Belgium, Spain, France, the Ulster Youth Orchestra and the Pacific Youth Orchestra in Japan. Many of his students now hold important orchestral and teaching positions around the world.

**Musical Concepts: www.musicalconcepts.net
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Cover image: Paul Gilson original early photo.
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Photos: Richard Benjafield



Gilson recording sessions-all in Guildhall Music Hall

Names in bold were on January 8th and 9th 2011 only. Names in italic were on April 3rd 2011 only. (Fackelzug/Scherzo Fantastique); Names in normal type were on all sessions.

Conductor: Eric Crees; **Producer:** Mike Purton; **Recording Engineer:** David Foister

french horn

Alex Edmundson

Meilyr Hughes
Ed Griffiths
Michael Arnold

Tom Pollock

Jonathan Quaintrell-Evans
Michael Arnold
Alex Wide

wagner tuba

Joseph Ryan
Emily Bier
Joanna Hurst

Charles Hutchinson

Kevin O'Hara

e flat trumpet

Sam Kinrade

trumpet

Sam Kinrade
Ross Clarke
Jonathan Abraham
Benedict Fox
James Davison
Darren Moore

trumpet (cont.)

Adam Farrant
Sarah Campbell
Rebecca Toft
Jordan Carpenter
Verity Jacklin

bass trumpet

Fabian Schmidt
Jon Roskilly

trombone 1

Craig Beattie
Katherine Hart

trombone 2

Joseph Hammond
Fabian Schmidt
Jon Roskilly

trombone 3

Carla Sabater Segurana
Patrick Kenny

bass trombone

Christine Harris
Yusuf Narcin
Adam Cooke

contrabass trombone

Christine Harris
Adam Cooke

euphonium

Iain Maxwell
Douglas Murdoch

tuba

Raymond Hearne
Yao Cong Tan
Hiroaki Kitagawa

contrabass tuba

Ben Gernon
Paul Whalley

timpani & percussion

Calie Hough
Joley Cragg
Felicity Hindle
Gareth Buckland
Craig Apps
Nathan Gregory
Emma King



“finally”

Photo: Richard Benjafield

Paul Gilson: La Fanfare Wagnérienne
Guildhall (School of Music) Brass Ensemble
conducted by Eric Crees

[1]	Scherzo Fantastique	8:05
[2]	Fackelzug	11:55
[3]-[4]	Rapsodie & Fantazijstuck	5:04 + 12:18
[5]	Fantaisie	6:45
[6]	Variations Symphoniques	19:57
[7]	Rapsodie	7:59

TOTAL TIME 72:07, DDD

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Final master/edit 2012
Producer: Mike Purton; Recording Engineer: David Foister

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C/o Co-ordinate, Dept. of Wind, Brass and Percussion,
Guildhall School of Music and Drama
Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DT
(UK) Tel. +44(0)7807 714097



“break”

Photo: Richard Benjfield