



William Walton: Muse of Fire (Music)

Stephen Lloyd

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When in June 1923 a bewildered audience in London's Aeolian Hall heard Edith Sitwell declaim her - Facade- poems through a megaphone, the 21-year-old William Walton - conducting behind a painted backcloth - stood on the threshold of fame. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s he was regarded as the white hope of British music, and a succession of works including the Viola Concerto, Belshazzar's Feast and the First Symphony more than fulfilled that early promise; he was also one of the first serious composers to be involved in films. Using first-hand accounts, this book explodes the myth of Facade's riotous reception, examines Walton's work in both films and radio and, through contemporary correspondence, articles and interviews - wherever possible in his own words - explores Walton's life and troubled times. It brings to the fore his complex personality - 'remote, removed, distant' in Laurence Olivier's words, in dynamic contrast with music of such vitality and drama. Composition for him was an arduous, often painful, process riddled with difficulties, uncertainties and self-doubts, and further complicated by several love affairs (one being with Italy) that inspired his finest works.

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