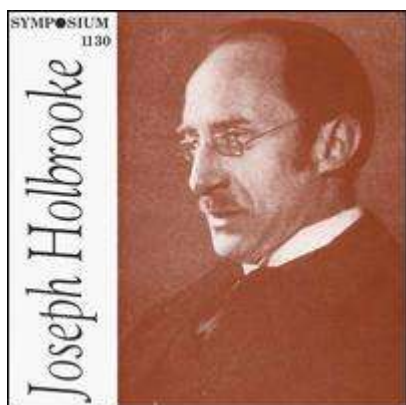




Joseph Charles Holbrooke (5 July 1878 – 5 August 1958).



Joseph Holbrooke was born **Joseph Charles Holbrook** in Croydon, Surrey. His father, also named Joseph, was a music hall musician and teacher, and his mother Helen was a Scottish singer.

Holbrooke was taught to play the piano and the violin by his father, who was not averse to the use of violence as a method of instruction, and played in music halls himself before entering the Royal Academy of Music as a student in 1893, where he studied under Frederick Corder for composition and Frederick Westlake for piano. Whilst at the academy he composed several works, chiefly piano miniatures, songs and some chamber music, which were performed at student concerts: at one recital, he substituted one of his own compositions in preference to Schumann's *Toccata*, incurring the wrath of the Principal, Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie. Whilst at the Royal Academy, Holbrooke won several prizes including the Potter Exhibition for pianoforte (1895), the Sterndale Bennett Scholarship (awarded on 29 April 1896), the Heathcote Long Prize for pianoforte (1896) and, in his final year (with the *Pantomime Suite* for strings), the Charles Lucas Prize for composition (1897). After leaving the Royal Academy Holbrooke sought a variety of occupations. In 1898 he undertook a tour of Scotland accompanying the music hall singer Arthur Lloyd,^{[16][17]} but the venture failed and he was forced to return to live with his father in London.^[18] He then moved out of the family home to Haringay where he began to teach music privately, but once again without financial success.

Whilst on tour, Holbrooke had sent the score of his orchestral poem *The Raven* to August Manns, conductor at the Crystal Palace. Manns accepted the work for performance and gave the premiere on 3 March 1900, whilst later that same year the orchestral variations on *Three Blind Mice* were also heard (Queen's Hall Promenade Concert, conducted by Henry Wood, 8 November 1900). In 1901 he won the Lesley Alexander Prize for chamber music with his Sextet in F minor and also received an invitation from Granville Bantock to become a member of the staff at the Birmingham and Midland Institute School of Music. He accepted the position, living with the Bantocks whilst teaching at the institution,^[26] but rapidly became dissatisfied with the routine and returned to London in 1902.^[27] There then followed a decade of prestigious commissions and performances, with notable works including the poem for chorus and orchestra *Queen Mab* (Leeds Festival, conducted by the composer, 6 October 1904), the orchestral poem *Ulalume* (Queen's Hall, conducted by the composer, 26 November 1904), the scena for

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baritone and orchestra *Marino Faliero* (Bristol Festival, conducted by the composer, 12 October 1905), the *Bohemian Songs* for baritone and orchestra (Norwich Festival, conducted by the composer, 25 October 1905), the poem for chorus and orchestra *The Bells* (Birmingham Festival, conducted by Hans Richter, 3 October 1906), the orchestral suite *Les Hommages* (Queen's Hall Promenade Concert, conducted by Henry Wood, 25 October 1906) and the choral symphony *Homage to E.A. Poe* (two movements first performed at the Bristol Festival, 16 October 1908). During this period Holbrooke also won a further prize, this time with his *Fantasie Quartet*, Op.17b entered for the 1905 chamber music competition initiated by Walter Willson Cobbett.

Collaboration on two further operas, *The Children of Don* (first performed at the London Opera House, conducted by Thomas Beecham, on 12 June 1912) and *Bronwen*, brought about the completion of Holbrooke's most ambitious project, a trilogy under the collective title *The Cauldron of Annwn* setting Scott-Ellis' versions of tales from the Welsh Mabinogion. Until his death in 1946, Scott-Ellis effectively acted as patron to Holbrooke, subsidising performances and publication of many of his works.

Throughout this period, Holbrooke also enjoyed a successful career as a virtuoso concert pianist. Besides his own compositions, his repertoire included the *Toccata* by Robert Schumann, *Islamey* by Mily Balakirev, Scriabin's Piano Sonata No.1, the fantasie *Africa* for piano and orchestra by Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No.1 and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No.2.

In 1902 Holbrooke had begun his own series of chamber music concerts to promote his music alongside new works by his British contemporaries.



MUSIC

Holbrooke was fascinated by the writings of Edgar Allan Poe which deal with the supernatural and the macabre, eventually producing over thirty compositions which he referred to as his "Poeana". These included orchestral works (*The Raven*, *Ulalume*, *The Sleeper*, *Amontillado* and *The Pit and the Pendulum*), a double concerto for clarinet and bassoon (*Tamerlane*), choral works (a choral symphony *Homage to E.A. Poe* and a poem for chorus and orchestra *The Bells*), a ballet (*The Masque of the Red Death*), a multitude of chamber works (such as the Clarinet Quintet *Ligeia*, the Trio *Fairyland* and the Nonet *Irene*) and several piano pieces.

During the early 1920s he became interested in writing in the new jazz idiom. Throughout his career he continually revised his compositions: titles were changed with an almost casual regularity (for instance, the opera *Pierrot and Pierrette* became *The Stranger*, the opera-ballet *The Wizard* became *The Enchanter* and the dramatic overture for brass band *1914* became *Clive of India*), many works were assigned several different opus numbers at different times, he borrowed music from one piece to another and recast works in different forms: for example, *The Pit and the Pendulum* draws its material from the opera-ballet *The Enchanter*, *Symphony No.7 (Al Aaraaf)* is a transcription for string orchestra of a String

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Sextet, *The Masque of the Red Death* which was originally another orchestral poem became a ballet, and what was illustrative of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Skeleton in Armour* was seemingly also a close depiction of Byron's *The Corsair*, whilst several different versions of his orchestral variations on *Auld Lang Syne* exist with a number of the supposed 'musical portraits' apparently applicable simultaneously to different contemporaries. Larger scores, particularly the operas in the *Cauldron of Annwn* trilogy, were also quarried to produce a variety of subsidiary works. Trios became quartets, quintets became sextets, chamber works and piano suites were augmented with additional movements only to be subsequently contracted by the removal of others, pieces for clarinet and piano were arranged for brass band and works which figure prominently in early promotional catalogues subsequently vanish from later ones.

Holbrooke was a late-Romantic composer, writing in a predominantly tonal, though richly chromatic, idiom. His style was essentially eclectic: whilst the early chamber works echo the language and methods of Brahms and Dvořák, there is also an exuberance informed by his affection for the music of Tchaikovsky:

"Perhaps Tchaikovsky has swayed him more than any other writer, although Mr. Holbrooke's music has nothing of the languorous grace of the Russian master's; it is rougher and more ragged at the edges, but it has much of Tchaikovsky's fire. In fact Mr. Holbrooke may be called an angular Tchaikovsky."¹

Works: Stage Works

Holbrooke wrote a trilogy of operas—The Children of Don, Dylan and Bronwen—commissioned by Lord Howard de Walden for his The Cauldron of Annwyn, based on the Mabinogion, and demanding considerable resources for any performance. His ballet scores include The Red Mask and Aucassin et Nicolette.

Choral and Orchestral Music

Holbrooke's fascination with the work of Edgar Allan Poe is reflected in his symphonic poems The Raven, Ulalume and The Bells (for chorus and orchestra). Other works include symphonies, and concertos for piano and for violin.

Chamber Music

Holbrooke's chamber music, like his other compositions, belongs in the world of late Romanticism. While some of his many works for smaller ensemble may appear jejune, he nevertheless achieved much in works like his String Sextet, Op. 43 'Henry Vaughan' and his Piano Quintet, Op. 44, with its Valse diabolique third movement that has provided a sobriquet for the whole work.

Literature: Josef Holbrooke, various appreciations by many authors, L. 1937 (Сборник).

Materials that were used: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Holbrooke,
http://www.naxos.com/person/Joseph_Holbrooke/23327.htm

¹ Walthew, Richard: *The Chamber music of Josef Holbrooke (The Sackbut)* reprinted in *Josef Holbrooke - Various appreciations by many authors* (London: Rudall Carte, 1937, pp.124-125)

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