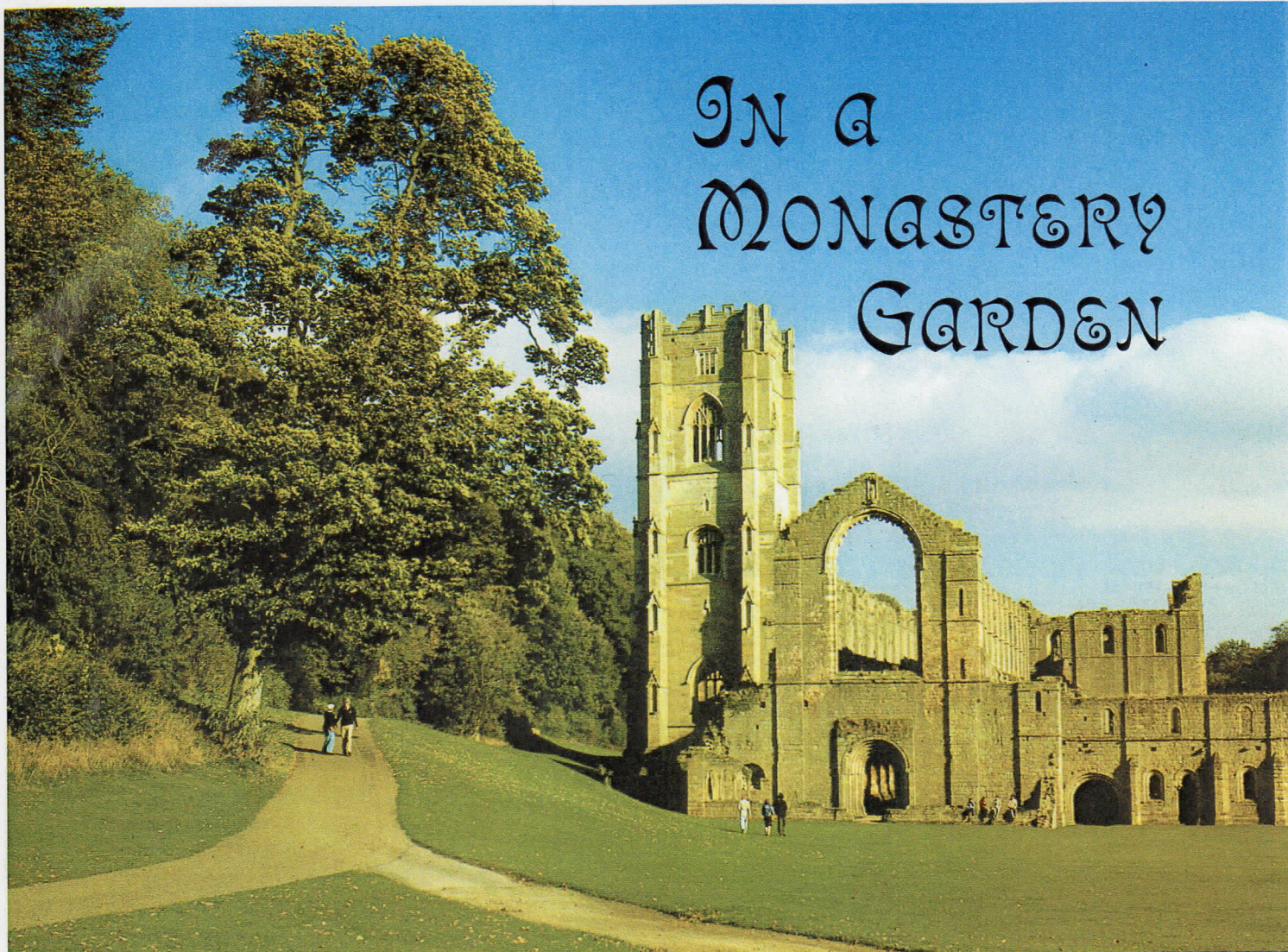


# IN A MONASTERY GARDEN



△ Fountains Abbey, near Ripon in the West Riding, a monastery founded by the Cistercian monks in the 12th century. It was just such a Yorkshire ruin which inspired Ketèlby to compose one of his most famous pieces, titled as above, during the First World War.

DOROTHY BURROWS

The strings of the concert orchestra send a warm, lyrical stream of melody soaring into the air, the sort of tune that stays in your head, reminding you of summer days, wartime friendships, or just cosy nights listening to the “wireless”. But what do we know about the English maestros of light music, the men who penned the rhapsodies, waltzes, marches and tarantellas that enchanted a whole generation of music-lovers and radio listeners?

Many of them are still well-known, of course, especially composers like Eric Coates (see *This England*, Summer 1997) who wrote orchestral suites in celebration of the Elizabethans, enduring tunes like *By a Sleepy Lagoon* and marches in praise of Knightsbridge and the daring feats such as the wartime “Dambuster” raids. Yet there are a whole host of other equally great composers whose works were just as popular in their day.

One man in particular took us far away into an exotic Persian Market and Chinese Temple Garden, but always brought us back again to good old England, to places like Hampstead Heath on a bank holiday, or a secret

monastery garden in the heart of the Yorkshire countryside. To older readers these specific musical settings will be

## The musical genius of ALBERT KETÈLBEY



— the Birmingham boy who became a brilliant composer of English Light Music.

quite familiar, for they are compositions by Albert Ketèlby — the light-music genius of the early 20th century.

Before we explore the background to his life, suffice it to say that, in musical terms at least, Ketèlby displayed all the qualities of the showman. His special effects, such as using bird-song recordings as part of his masterpiece *In a Monastery Garden*, were remarkable and highly-renowned, whilst his often grand and lavish orchestral gestures caused spines to tingle in concert halls and theatres.

One fine example of this is the march *With Honour Crowned*, a swaggering, brassy piece, full of thundering drums and clashing symbols which ranks with Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* marches. So why is it never played at concerts? Perhaps it is, to quote the kill-joys who try to censor wholesome music and art, too “nationalistic” for modern audiences, or perhaps it isn't profound enough for the poseurs of the *avant-garde*. One thing's for sure, a blast of Ketèlby's martial music is not for the faint-hearted or weak-minded!

Yet, although a fine march-composer,

▷ *Lechlade Church looks out over the meadows of the upper Thames valley in Gloucestershire, a typical English scene epitomised by the tune Bells Across the Meadow. However, Ketèlbey also wrote many exotic-sounding pieces based on foreign lands and customs.* IVAN BELCHER

he was most at home in music that combined lyrical softness with all the grand sweep and quality of symphonic music.

He was an accomplished pianist and organist, as well being proficient on oboe, cello, clarinet and horn. And he often had flashes of musical inspiration — as in 1915 when driving his open-topped car through rural Yorkshire he came upon a ruined monastery... and the bird-song he heard there prompted him to write his most famous piece.

Mention the name of a Ketèlbey composition to your grandpa and he is likely to whistle the tune back to you, almost as if it were a ditty. Yet in their true form, most of the tunes were beautifully-crafted, full-bodied pieces of music in their own right.

On the one hand Ketèlbey seems close to Elgar, and on the other he seems to inhabit the world of the popular ballad. He is almost a later version of Sir Arthur Sullivan, a man whose witty Savoy operettas, composed in conjunction with W.S. Gilbert, sometimes obscured his other more serious works.

Albert William Ketèlbey was born on 4th August, 1875, in Birmingham, the son of an engraver. From an early age he showed remarkable musical gifts. His mother and father were very proud when at the age of 11 he composed an ambitious piano sonata which he performed at the Worcester Town Hall to much acclaim. And there was one admirer whose praise was particularly valid — the father of modern English music, Sir Edward Elgar. This early success encouraged Mr. and Mrs. Ketèlbey to send their son to compete for a scholarship at Trinity College, London. Albert, then only 13, duly won the scholarship, his marks far exceeding those of any other candidate. After much study he took his first musical post as organist of St. John's Church, Wimbledon — at 16!

Whilst there he gained a thorough grounding in musical form and it was to be an apprenticeship that served him well. Indeed, sometimes in his more stately compositions you can hear an almost hymn-tune quality to the music, a legacy no doubt of the important formative years. At the age of 20 he got the chance to conduct the orchestra of a light opera company and soon made his mark, impressing key people. This young man, with his background in the sombre world of church organists and college scholarships, showed a great command of the genre, and two years later he took over the musical directorship of the Vaude-



ville Theatre in the Strand. At the fashionable heart of London, in the glinting days of the "Naughty Nineties", young Albert became a celebrity.

Yet, despite his growing stature in light entertainment, Ketèlbey still liked to keep his hand in as far as the world of serious music was concerned, and he

(Continued overleaf)

▽ *It was not until the middle of this century that most workers were granted annual paid holidays, prior to which they had to make the most of their very few days off. Londoners always flocked to Hampstead Heath on bank holidays, and Ketèlbey brilliantly recreated "all the fun of the fair" in his bright Cockney Suite. Edwardian-style swing boats, seen here at Northleach, Gloucestershire, remind us of the simple pleasures of yesteryear.* PAUL FELIX



Afton Down on the Isle of Wight, a delightful part of England to which Ketèlbey retired after his successful musical career, affording ample time to indulge in his favourite pastime — of playing billiards!

MALCOLM DONALD



composed a quartet, an overture and a concert piece for piano and orchestra. There was a thirst for new works at that time in the late-Victorian period when Ketèlbey was composing at the onset of the great renaissance of English music, which saw the emergence of such giant figures as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Frederick Delius.

The atmosphere was right for a budding new composer and Ketèlbey saw all his main compositions performed by the London orchestras. For some reason, however, these works have today been largely forgotten, relegated to the same backwaters as Havergal Brian's grand opera *The Tigers*, Hurlstone's *Alfred the Great*, and Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers*.

Perhaps Ketèlbey sensed the anonymity that would come from being a "minor league" English composer, or

perhaps he realised that it was only in popular music that he would achieve fame and fortune. Whatever the reason, he soon devoted himself to lighter compositions, and thus to the beautiful and ingenious masterpieces on which his reputation now rests.

His first success was *Phantom Melody* (1912), followed after the war with *In a Persian Market* (1920), *Sanctuary of the Heart* (1924), and *Bells Across the Meadow* (1927). Ketèlbey's music was taken up by small orchestras on liners, hotel and theatre ensembles, pianists in hotel lounges and palm courts, bandmasters, street entertainers and singers. The atmospheric quality also made him an ideal composer for the silent cinema, a medium for which he produced a large number of compositions. His output was prolific and you might possibly call him the first British film composer, although early cinema music was purely an accompaniment to, rather than an integral part of, the film.

Ketèlbey's forté was painting moods and musical scenes which would be instantly recognisable to a wide public. One such portrait was *The Clock and the Dresden Figures*, a miniature of enor-

◁ With his clever imitations of bird-song, tunes such as *In a Monastery Garden* and *Bells Across the Meadow* were tailor-made for the exquisite talents of singing-whistler, Ronnie Ronalde (75), who now lives in New Zealand. He can be heard on this Evergreen cassette (Ref: EVR 55). See page 82.

▷ Peter Dawson (1882-1961), the brilliant bass-baritone who, after moving to England from his native Australia, soon included many of Ketèlbey's songs in his extensive repertoire. He sings *In a Monastery Garden* on the new cassette and CD announced opposite.

mous charm that even contained an authentic-sounding "tick-tock" to amuse the audience! With such obvious musical characterisation, it is little wonder that his talents were employed by the fledgling film industry. His intriguing musical tricks were also to the fore in the *Bank Holiday* movement of the *Cockney Suite*, recently recorded complete for the first time since the early days of 78 rpm records.

After the Thirties, Ketèlbey's style gradually went out of vogue. The inter-war era of romance, that had its roots in the self-confidence of the Edwardian age, was in decline, and people began to find its musical expression somewhat outdated. But the composer had enjoyed an Indian summer of great success and was able to spend his later years in comfortable retirement on the peaceful Isle of Wight.

Ketèlbey remained a very private person throughout his life. As a youngish man he had married Charlotte Curzon, but their union was not blessed with children, and when his wife died after the Second World War, he married a widow, Mrs. Mabel Maud Pritchett. He was 73 at the time and they lived happily together in the Cowes area for the next 11 years, where he died on 26th November 1959, aged 84.

Among those who thrived on Ketèlbey's music was the famous singing-whistler Ronnie Ronalde, who scored a great success with *In a Monastery Garden*, which virtually became his signature tune, and also *Bells Across the Meadow*. Ronnie now lives in New Zealand and an article about him appeared in *Evergreen* magazine, Winter 1997. Another performer who sang many Ketèlbey numbers was Peter Dawson, the great Australian bass-baritone, who was featured in *This England*, Spring 1994.


Although the name Ketèlbey was guaranteed to sell concert tickets, sheet music and gramophone records, he occa-


**Ronnie Ronalde**

The Whistling Yodeller

Tracks include:

- ★ *Bells Across the Meadow* ★ *If I Were a Blackbird*
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- ★ *Dream of Olwen*
- ★ *Yodelling Waltz*
- ★ *When The Fields Are White With Daisies* ★ *The Happy Whistler*
- ★ *I Leave My Heart in an English Garden*
- ★ *Let Me Sing in Echo Valley*
- ★ *When You Were Sweet Sixteen*
- ★ *Mockin' Bird Hill* ★ *Last Night*





**Evergreen Melodies**



## KETELBEY'S MAJOR WORKS

★ *In a Monastery Garden* ★ *Bells Across the Meadow* ★ *Wedgwood Blue* ★ *Chal Romano (Gypsy Lad)* ★ *In a Persian Market* ★ *In a Chinese Temple Garden* ★ *In the Mystic Land of Egypt* ★ *With the Romanian Gypsies* ★ *From a Japanese Screen* ★ *In a Camp of the Ancient Britons* ★ *Italian Twilight* ★ *By the Blue Hawaiian Waters* ★ *The Vision of Fuji-San* ★ *Jungle Drums* ★ *Algerian Scene* ★ *Sunbeams and Butterflies* ★ *In the Moonlight* ★ *Dance of the Merry Mascots* ★ *Musical Jigsaw* ★ *The Clock and the Dresden Figures* ★ *With Honour Crowned* ★ *Sanctuary of the Heart* ★ *In a Lover's Garden* ★ *Cockney Suite* — *Buckingham Palace, Lambeth Walk, Palais de Danse, Cenotaph, Bank Holiday, ('Appy' Ampstead)* ★ *Broken Melody* ★ *The Adventurers* ★ *Three Fanciful Etchings* ★ *In a Fairy Realm* ★ *The Wonder Worker* ★ *In Holiday Mood* ★ *Phantom Melody*

Albert Ketèlbej also composed many other lesser-known songs, orchestral and instrumental pieces.

For further information on all aspects of English Light Music, send a stamped addressed envelope to: The Light Music Society, Lancaster Farm, Longridge, Preston, Lancashire, PR3 2NB.

sionally put on a disguise. Compositions appeared by "William Aston" as well as someone called "Anton Vodorinski" — and an adoring public, no doubt impressed by this exotic European name, duly came into being. Little did they know! A foreign name is often a key to success with the fickle British public, as Elgar correctly judged when he gave his salon pieces French names. In his younger days, Sir Edward was desperate to get his name established: "I'd try Greek if it would sell!" he once remarked.

Ketèlbej, though, went one better. He tried Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, and every other exotic flavour you could think of, creating in the process an Aladdin's cave of marvellous musical treasures. We are lucky in these islands. We have the glories and depth of Vaughan Williams; the delicate poetry of Delius; the bitter-sweet sophistry of William Walton, but we also have the chirpy tunefulness of Eric Coates and Haydn Wood, and the kaleidoscopic colour, rich melodies, and inventiveness of Albert Ketèlbej.

When we think of the great ages of English music, let us not forget our immense heritage of light orchestral music. Ketèlbej may not be a name that is now on everyone's lips, but his scores, like many others in the great English Light Music tradition, are rapidly making a well-deserved come-back.

PETER GIBBS



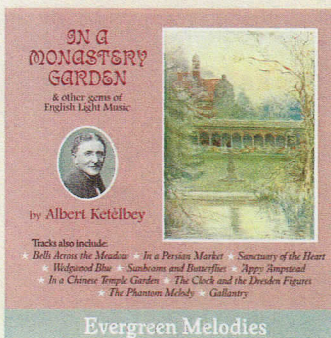
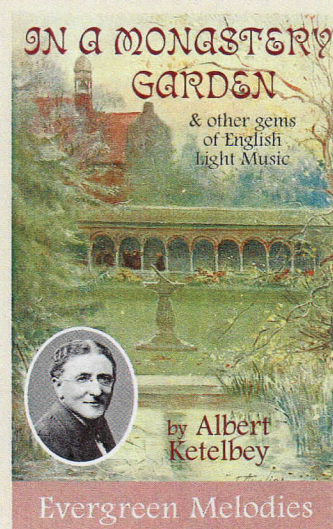
Although he composed many foreign-sounding pieces, Albert Ketèlbej was English to the core. While his *Cockney Suite* highlights several of London's famous landmarks, the three movements of *In a Lover's Garden* beautifully portray the romance of youth, through to the contentment of a golden wedding. In this cottage garden at Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex, one can easily visualise the inspiration for another of his suites entitled *Sunbeams and Butterflies*.

PAUL STRONG

## Travel the world — with the tunes of Albert Ketèlbej

*The English composer who painted exotic musical pictures at home and abroad*

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