



ST MATTHEW'S CHOIR

Phiroz Dalal
Conductor

Ken Williams
Piano

Laurence Meikle
Baritone

Saturday 4th October 2008

7.30pm

www.smce.org.uk

Ralph Vaughan Williams 1872 – 1958

Vaughan Williams pronounced his first name "Rafe". His father was Reverend Arthur Vaughan Williams, his mother was a granddaughter of Josiah Wedgwood and Caroline Darwin, elder sister of Charles Darwin.

“Vaughan Williams is arguably the greatest composer Britain has seen since the days of Henry Purcell. In a long and extensive career, he composed music notable for its power, nobility and expressiveness, representing, perhaps, the essence of 'Englishness'.

Vaughan Williams was born in 1872 in the Cotswold village of Down Ampney. He was educated at Charterhouse School, then Trinity College, Cambridge. Later he was a pupil of Stanford and Parry at the Royal College of Music after which he studied with Max Bruch in Berlin and Maurice Ravel in Paris.

At the turn of the century he was among the very first to travel into the countryside to collect folk-songs and carols from singers, notating them for future generations to enjoy. As musical editor of *The English Hymnal* he composed several hymns that are now world-wide favourites (*For all the Saints, Come down O love Divine*). Later he also helped to edit *The Oxford Book of Carols*, with similar success...When the young Vaughan Williams enrolled at the Royal College of Music in 1890, composing meant writing for "the organ loft and the festival platform". Opera was an activity best left to foreigners. Gilbert and Sullivan's works were an entertaining freak show. Serious English music was either played on a church organ or by an orchestra that sounded like a church organ writ large.”¹

¹ The Man Who Set England to Music, *The Independent* (London) April 11, 2007 by Andy McSmith

PROGRAMME

Toward the Unknown Region (1906)

“As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, the work of the American poet Walt Whitman seemed to many to capture the essence of the new age, portraying an optimistic vision of a world inspired by human and scientific endeavour and the spirit of adventure. As well as Vaughan Williams, several other British composers - notably Holst and Delius - turned to Whitman’s groundbreaking collection, *Leaves of Grass*, for inspiration. The radical, humanistic philosophy of Whitman’s verse held a particular appeal for Vaughan Williams.”²

Walt Whitman (1819–1892). *Leaves of Grass*. 1900.

DAREST thou now, O Soul,
Walk out with me toward the Unknown Region,
Where neither ground is for the feet, nor any path to follow?

No map, there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.

I know it not, O Soul;
Nor dost thou—all is a blank before us;
All waits, undream’d of, in that region—that inaccessible land.

Till, when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds, bound us.

Then we burst forth—we float,
In Time and Space, O Soul—prepared for them;
Equal, equipt at last—(O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil, O Soul.

² John Bawden
Musical Director (1994 - 2006)
Fareham Philharmonic Choir

Mass in G Minor (1922)

“The early 1920's marked a pastoral interlude for Vaughan Williams. In 1921 Vaughan Williams wrote his *Mass in G minor*. Its musical link with the pastoral works is unmissable, as the piece is full of the rich harmonies associated with the composer in his most 'English summertime' moments. The piece is dedicated to Gustav Holst and the Whitsuntide Singers”³

The piece is written for unaccompanied double choir and four soloists, and divided into five movements:

1. Kyrie
2. Gloria in excelsis
3. Credo
4. Sanctus Osanna I - Benedictus - Osanna II
5. Agnus Dei

Five Mystical Songs (1911)

The Five Mystical Songs were written in 1911 and first performed at the Worcester Three Choirs Festival that year. Vaughan Williams was a Christian agnostic, but these are settings of deeply religious poems by the metaphysical poet George Herbert (1593-1633), who entered the Anglican priesthood in 1630 after an academic career at Cambridge and, briefly, as an MP. The songs were written to be performed together as one work. The first four are personal mystical meditations, particularly the third, in which the soloist takes the lead and the chorus has a supporting role. The fifth song is a triumphant hymn sung by the chorus alone.

1. Easter
2. I Got Me Flowers
3. Love Bade Me Welcome
4. The Call
5. Antiphon

Future concerts

Sunday 30th November 7pm: Advent Carol Service
Sunday 14th December 7pm: Christmas Show

³ Barry Creasy Chairman Collegium Musicum of London