



Truth From Above

Early Hymns & Choral Works by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Saturday, August 26, 2023 ~ 7:00pm
St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, Bellevue

Three Elizabethan Partsongs (1896)

1. *Sweet day*..... George Herbert (1593–1633)
2. *The willow song*..... William Shakespeare (1564–1616)
3. *O mistress mine*..... William Shakespeare

SINE NOMINE ~ *For all the saints* (1906)..... William Walsham How (1823–1897)

Ring out your bells (1902)..... Philip Sidney (1554–1586)

DOWN AMPNEY ~ *Come down, O love divine* (1906)..... R. F. Littledale (1833–1890)

Rest (1902)..... Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

DEIRDRE ~ *Christ be with me* (1904)..... Cecil Francis Alexander (1818–1895)

Come away, Death (1902)..... William Shakespeare

FOREST GREEN ~ *O little town of Bethlehem* (1906)..... Phillips Brooks (1835–1893)

The truth sent from above ~ FROM EIGHT TRADITIONAL ENGLISH CAROLS (1919)

The turtle dove (1924)

Baritone Soloist: Trevor Tsang

Kyrie ~ FROM MASS IN G MINOR (1921)

Soli: Heather Irwin, Gail Erickson, Christopher Kruse, Jeremy Kings

Five English Folksongs (1913)

1. *The dark-eyed sailor*
2. *The spring time of the year*
3. *Just as the tide was flowing*
4. *The lover's ghost*
5. *Wassail song*

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Program notes by Gary D. Cannon

Any budding young composer desires three benefits: an independent income, a good work ethic, and talent. When Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) started out, he had the first two of those criteria in spades; talent... not so much. One relative opined, “He will go on with his music.” His early works, written while a student at Cambridge and the Royal College Music, are competent but unoriginal; the *Three Elizabethan Partsongs* (1896), for example, are typical Victorian fare. Vaughan Williams first came to note through art-songs like *Linden Lea* (1902) and the *Songs of Travel* (1904). But he didn’t neglect choral miniatures at this time either: see *Ring out your bells; Come away, death*; and the more rather imaginative *Rest* (all 1902).

The mid-1900s brought about three events which fundamentally changed his approach to composition. In 1903 he began collecting folksongs—that is, walking from village to village, asking the elders to sing songs from their childhood, and notating them those tunes and lyrics for preservation. The next year, Vaughan Williams was asked to serve as editor of *The English Hymnal* (1906). His love for pre-Victorian English hymnody came to the fore, and he wrote several hymns himself, among them DOWN AMPNEY, DEIRDRE, FOREST GREEN (an alternate tune for “O little town of Bethlehem”), and, most famously, SINE NOMINE. Finally, he went to Paris to study with the great Maurice Ravel, who called Vaughan Williams “the only one of my students who doesn’t write my music.” This French touch provided the suaveness and refinement that his music had lacked.

Increasingly prominent performances came his way, starting with *Toward the Unknown Region*, his first of many Whitman settings, for the Leeds Festival in 1907. He wrote music for Greek plays produced at Cambridge, most notably *The Wasps* (1909). The year 1910 brought two major premieres: the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, for strings, at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester; and *A Sea Symphony* at Leeds, another Whitman exploration, and

the first-ever symphony in which the chorus sings throughout (well, tied with Mahler’s Eighth). Folk-song-collecting bore fruit with the popular *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* (1912) and the expertly wrought *Five English Folksongs* (1914). The biggest triumph of all was *A London Symphony* (1914).

Then the First World War began, and Vaughan Williams ceased composing altogether. He served as an ambulance man and artillery officer in France and Greece, surviving harrowing conditions. When the War ended in 1919, he found solace in more contemplative works, such as *The Lark Ascending* (1921) for violin and orchestra, *A Pastoral Symphony* (1922), and the neo-Tudor *Mass in G minor* (1922). He returned to folksongs on large scale and small: the folk opera *Hugh the Drover* (1924) and sublime arrangements such as *The turtle dove* (1924) and the *Eight Traditional English Carols* (1919), which included *The truth sent from above*, a tune he had already employed in the *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*.

Tonight’s concert will include the various unaccompanied works mentioned above, ranging in time from the *Three Elizabethan Partsongs* to *The turtle dove*. You will hear a mixture of the three categories of his output for chamber chorus. Earliest are those works on literary texts; of these, his setting of Rossetti’s *Rest* is the only one in the canon. There are four selections from *The English Hymnal*, which reflect Vaughan Williams’s growing interest in modal harmonies and folk-style melodic pacing. The Kyrie from the *Mass in G minor* fits loosely with them as his deepest exploration of sacred music. And finally, no one arranges folksongs with such panache and deft insight as does Vaughan Williams.

But, I hear you cry, what about the rest of Vaughan Williams’s story?

The period between the Wars brought Vaughan Williams to the forefront of English music. The list of masterworks astounds: *Sancta Civitas* (1926), the Shakespeare opera *Sir John in Love* (1929), the ballet *Job* (1930), the Fourth Symphony (1935), *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936), the one-act opera *Riders to the Sea*

(1937), among others. He became President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. He conducted the Bach Choir of London. He was a professor of composition at the Royal College of Music. He lectured at Bryn Mawr in Philadelphia. He began conducting the Leith Hill Festival in an annual series of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. He co-edited the *Oxford Book of Carols*. It seemed there was nothing Vaughan Williams couldn't do.

During the Second World War, he contributed to the war effort by composing scores to propagandistic films such as *49th Parallel* (1940); his most famed score was the postwar *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948). In 1951, Covent Garden produced his long-awaited opera on Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. His late symphonies, Tuba Concerto, and choral *Hodie* (both 1954) all demonstrate a keen interest in new and novel sonorities. As that skeptical relative had once commented: Vaughan Williams *will* go on with his music.



THREE ELIZABETHAN PARTSONGS

1. *Sweet day*

Sweet day! so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
For thou must die.

Sweet spring! full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie,
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

2. *The willow song*

The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow.
The fresh streams ran by her and murmur'd her moans;
Sing willow, willow, willow:
Her salt tears fell from her, and soften'd the stones;
Sing willow, willow, willow,
Sing all a green willow must be my garland.

3. *O mistress mine*

O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hear; your true love's coming,
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no farther, pretty sweeting;
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.



SINE NOMINE

For all the Saints who from their labours rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confest,
Thy name, O Jesu, be forever blest.
Alleluya! Alleluya!

O blest communion! fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluya! Alleluya!

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph-song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluya! Alleluya!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest:
Sweet is the calm of Paradise the blest.
Alleluya! Alleluya!

RING OUT YOUR BELLS

Ring out your bells, let mourning shows be spread,
For Love is dead.
All love is dead, infected
With plague of deep disdain:
Worth, as nought worth, rejected,
And faith fair scorn doth gain.
From so ungrateful fancy,
From such a female frenzy,
From them that use men thus,
Good Lord deliver us!

Let dirge be sung, and trentals rightly read,
For Love is dead.
Sir Wrong his tomb ordaineth
My mistress' marble heart;
Which epitaph containeth,
'Her eyes were once his dart.'
From so ungrateful fancy,
From such a female frenzy,
From them that use men thus,
Good Lord deliver us!

Alas I lie, rage hath this error bred;
Love is not dead;
Love is not dead, but sleepeth
In her unmatched mind,
Where she his counsel keepeth
Till due deserts she find.
Therefore from so vile fancy,
to call such wit a frenzy,
who Love can temper thus,
Good Lord deliver us!



DOWN AMPNEY

Come down, O Love divine,
Seek thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O comforter draw near,
Within my soul appear,
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,
Till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let thy glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity
Mine outward vesture be,
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;
True lowliness of heart,
Which takes the humbler part,
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong,
With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
Till he become the place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.



REST

O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes;
Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth.
Lie close around her; leave no room for mirth
With its harsh laughter, nor for sound of sighs.

She hath no questions, she hath no replies,
Hush'd in and curtain'd with a blessèd dearth
Of all that irk'd her from her hour of birth;
With stillness that is almost Paradise.

Darkness more clear than noonday holdeth her,
Silence more musical than any song;
Even her very heart hath ceased to stir:
Until the morning of Eternity
Her rest shall not begin nor end, but be;
And when she wakes she will not think it long.



DEIRDRE

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.



COME AWAY, DEATH

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O prepare it!
My part of death no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flow'r, not a flow'r sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor cor[p]se, where my bones shall be thrown:

A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O, where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there!



FOREST GREEN

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together,
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth;
For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him,
The dear Christ enters in.

Where children pure and happy
Pray to the blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to thee,
Son of the mother mild;
Where charity stands watching
And faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks,
And Christmas comes once more.



THE TRUTH SENT FROM ABOVE

This is the truth sent from above,
The truth of God, the God of love;
Therefore don't turn me from your door,
But hearken all both rich and poor.

The first thing which I do relate,
Is that God did man create,
The next thing which to you I'll tell:
Woman was made with man to dwell.

Then after this, 'twas God's own choice,
To place them both in Paradise,
There to remain from evil free,
Except they ate of such a tree.

And they did eat, which was a sin,
And thus their ruin did begin;
Ruined themselves, both you and me,
And all of their posterity.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes,
Till God the Lord did interpose,
And so a promise soon did run
That He would redeem us by his Son.

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THE TURTLE DOVE

Fare you well, my dear, I must be gone,
And leave you for a while;
If I roam away I'll come back again,
Though I roam ten thousand miles, my dear,
Though I roam ten thousand miles.

So fair thou art my bonny lass,
So deep in love am I;
But I never will prove false to the bonny lass I love,
Till the stars fall from the sky, my dear,
Till the stars fall from the sky.

The sea will never run dry, my dear,
Nor the rocks melt with the sun,
But I never will prove false
To the bonny lass I love,
Till all these things be done, my dear,
Till all these things be done.

O yonder doth sit that little turtle dove,
He doth sit on yonder high tree,
A-making a moan for the loss of his love,
As I will do for thee, my dear,
As I will do for thee.



KYRIE

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.
Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.



FIVE ENGLISH FOLKSONGS

1. *The dark-eyed sailor*

It was a comely young lady fair,
Was walking out for to take the air;
She met a sailor all on her way,
So I paid attention to what they did say.

Said William, 'Lady, why walk alone?
The night is coming and the day near gone.'
She said, while tears from her eyes did fall,
'It's a dark-eyed sailor that's proving my downfall.'

'It's two long years since he left the land;
He took a gold ring from off my hand;
We broke the token, here's part with me,
And the other lies rolling at the bottom of the sea.'

Then half the ring did young William show,
She was distracted midst joy and woe.
'O welcome, William, I've lands and gold
For my dark-eyed sailor, so manly, true and bold.'

Then in a village down by the sea,
They joined in wedlock and well agree.
So maids be true while your love's away,
For a cloudy morning brings forth a shining day.

2. *The spring time of the year*

As I walked out one morning,
In the spring time of the year,
I overheard a sailor boy,
Likewise a lady fair.

They sang a song together,
Made the valleys for to ring,
While the birds on spray
And the meadows gay
Proclaimed the lovely spring.

3. *Just as the tide was flowing*

One morning in the month of May,
Down by some rolling river,
A jolly sailor, I did stray,
When I beheld my lover.

She carelessly along did stray,
A-picking of the daisies gay;
And sweetly sang her roundelay,
Just as the tide was flowing.

O! her dress it was so white as milk,
And jewels did adorn her.
Her shoes were made of the crimson silk,
Just like some lady of honour.

Her cheeks were red, her eyes were brown,
Her hair in ringlets hanging down;
She'd a lovely brow without a frown,
Just as the tide was flowing.

I made a bow and said, 'Fair maid,
How came you here so early;
My heart by you it is betray'd
For I do love you dearly.'

'I am a sailor come from sea
If you will accept of my company
To walk and view the fishes play.'
Just as the tide was flowing.

No more we said, but on our way
We gang'd along together;
The small birds sang, and the lambs did play,
And pleasant was the weather.

When we were weary we did sit down,
Beneath a tree with branches round;
For my true love at last I'd found,
Just as the tide was flowing.

4. *The lover's ghost*

Well met, well met, my own true Love;
Long time I have been absent from thee,
I am lately come from the salt sea,
And 'tis all for the sake, my love, of thee.

I have three ships all on the salt sea,
And one of them has brought me to land.
I've four and twenty mariners on board,
You shall have music at your command.

The ship wherein my love shall sail
Is glorious for to behold.
The sails shall be of shining silk,
The mast shall be of the fine beaten gold.

I might have had a King's daughter,
And fain she would have married me,
But I forsook her crown of gold,
And 'tis all for the sake, my love, of thee.

5. *Wassail song*

Wassail, Wassail, all over the town,
Our bread it is white and our ale it is brown;
Our bowl it is made of the green maple tree;
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Here's a health to the ox and to his right eye,
Pray God send our master a good Christmas pie,
A good Christmas pie as e'er I did see.
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Here's a health to the ox and to his right horn,
Pray God send our master a good crop of corn,
A good crop of corn as e'er I did see.
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Here's a health to the ox and to his long tail,
Pray God send our master a good cask of ale,
A good cask of ale as e'er I did see.
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Come butler, come fill us a bowl of the best;
Then I pray that your soul in heaven may rest;
But if you do bring us a bowl of the small,
May the Devil take butler, bowl and all!

Then here's to the maid in the lily white smock,
Who tripp'd to the door and slipp'd back the lock,
Who tripp'd to the door and pull'd back the pin,
For to let these jolly Wassailers walk in.



ABOUT OUR CONDUCTOR

Dr. Gary D. Cannon is one of the Seattle area's most versatile choral personalities, active as conductor, musicologist, and singer. In 2016, he founded the Emerald Ensemble, a professional chamber choir engaging the region's leading ensemble singers. Since 2008 he has served as conductor and Artistic Director of two prominent community choirs. The Cascadian Chorale, a chamber choir based in Bellevue, performs a breadth of mostly unaccompanied repertoire, including many premieres of works by local composers. The Vashon Island Chorale is a focal point of its island's thriving arts community. At the invitation of Early Music Seattle, he founded and directed a Renaissance choir, Sine Nomine (2008–15). He has conducted three times for Vashon Opera, as well as Choral Arts Northwest, Kirkland Choral Society, Northwest Mahler Festival, several choirs at the University of Washington, and others.

Cannon gives pre-concert lectures for Seattle Symphony and has provided written program notes for choirs across the country. As a tenor, he has appeared as a soloist with Pacific Northwest Ballet, Seattle Philharmonic, and the Auburn, Eastside, Rainier, and Sammamish Symphony Orchestras. A California native, Cannon holds degrees from the University of California at Davis and the University of Washington.

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We'd like to thank this year's coach and conductor, Gary D. Cannon, for helping us refine our sound as an ensemble.

We also wish to thank St. Margaret's Episcopal Church for graciously supporting our efforts and hosting both our rehearsals and our concert.

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WHO WE ARE

Artistic Director

Aaron Giles

Coach & Conductor

Gary D. Cannon

Soprano

Elisabeth Baeskens

Vera Giles

Heather Irwin

Tenor

Aaron Giles

Christopher Kruse

John La Fond

Alto

Dawn Fosse Cook

Gail Erickson

Elaine Tsang

Bass

Carl Bolstad

Jeremy Kings

Trevor Tsang

Doug Wyatt

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