

# Ralph Vaughan Williams and the Chamber Choir

**Emerald Choral Academy**

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**Gary D. Cannon**

Artistic Director, Emerald Ensemble

[gary@emeraldensemble.org](mailto:gary@emeraldensemble.org)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and the Chamber Choir  
Biography – (1) Early Works (i)

- Youth, family.
- Education.
  - 1890, RCM with Parry.
  - 1892, Cambridge with Wood.
  - 1895, RCM with Stanford.
  - 1897, Max Bruch in Berlin.
- Beginning a career.
  - 1902, *Linden Lea*. First published work.
  - 1903, begins collecting folk songs.
  - 1906, *The English Hymnal*.

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Biography – (1) Early Works (ii)

- Important premieres.
  - 1907, *Toward the Unknown Region* (Whitman), Leeds Festival.
  - 1907–08, studies with Ravel in Paris.
  - 1909, *The Wasps* for Cambridge.
  - 1910, *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, Three Choirs (Gloucester).
  - 1910, *A Sea Symphony* (Whitman), Leeds Festival.
  - 1910, *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*. Folksongs bearing fruit.
  - 1913, Shakespeare scores for Stratford.
  - 1914, *A London Symphony*.
- 1914–19. The Great War.

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## Biography – (2) Between the Wars (i)

- Employment.
  - Teaching. 1919, professor of composition at RCM.
  - Conducting. 1921–8, conductor of Bach Choir.
  - Editing. 1925, *Songs of Praise* – 1928, *Oxford Book of Carols*.
  - Lecturing. 1932, Bryn Mawr in Philadelphia (later Cornell).
- Collecting thoughts after the Great War.
  - 1921, *The Lark Ascending*, for violin and orchestra.
  - 1922, *A Pastoral Symphony*, based on war experience.
  - 1922, *Mass in G minor*, based on Tudor music.
  - 1924, *Hugh the Drover*, folksong opera, begun before the war.

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## Biography – (2) Between the Wars (ii)

- The leader of British classical music.
  - 1926, *Sancta Civitas*, Biblical oratorio.
  - 1929, *Sir John in Love*, Shakespeare opera.
  - 1930, *Job* at Norwich.
  - 1935, *Symphony 4*.
  - 1936, *Five Tudor Portraits* and *Dona Nobis Pacem*.
  - 1937, *Riders to the Sea*, one-act opera.
- Other events.
  - 1931, first *St Matthew Passion* at Leith Hill Festival.
  - 1932, President of English Folk Dance and Song Society.
  - 1937, coronation of King George VI.
  - 1938, meets Ursula Wood.

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## Biography – (3) Late Works

- 1939–45. The Second World War.
  - 1940, *49th Parallel*, first film score.
  - 1943, *Symphony 5*, based on *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
- New sonorities, new approaches.
  - 1948, *Symphony 6*.
  - 1948, *Scott of the Antarctic*, film score. 1953, *Sinfonia Antartica*.
  - 1951, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, opera at Covent Garden.
  - 1953, coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.
  - 1954, Tuba Concerto.
  - 1954, *Hodie*, major Christmas work.
  - 1956, *Symphony 8*.
  - 1958, *Symphony 9*.

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Works for Chamber Choir

- Three categories.
  - Music for the church.
  - Music based on folksongs.
  - Music with literary texts.
- Each category represented in each period.
- Omissions.
  - Arrangements.
  - Excerpts.

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## Early Works, 1900–1914

- Literary.
  - 1902, *Rest* (Rossetti), same year as *Linden Lea* publication.
  - 1905, *Darest thou now, O Soul* (Whitman), his first Whitman.
  - 1913, *Love is a sickness*, madrigal.
- Church.
  - 1906, *The English Hymnal*: 4 original tunes, 65 harmonizations.
    - Including *Sine Nomine* and *Salve festa dies*.
  - 1911, *Five Mystical Songs* (Herbert).
- Folksongs.
  - 1906, *Down among the dead men*, for TB, for *Pilgrim's Progress*.
  - 1914, *Five English Folk Songs*.



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Between the Wars, 1920–39 (i)

- Folksongs.
  - 1919–20, carols in simple arrangements.
  - 1919, *The turtle dove*, TB (SATB, 1924).
  - 1921, *Loch Lomond*, TB (SATB, 1931).
  - 1934, another flurry: *Six English Folk Songs*, TB.
    - Also *John Dory*.

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Between the Wars, 1920–39 (ii)

- Church.
  - 1920, *O clap your hands*, with organ and/or brass.
  - 1921, *Lord, thou hast been our refuge*.
  - 1922, *Mass in G minor*, for Westminster Cathedral.
  - 1922, *O vos omnes*.
  - 1925, *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* ('Village Service'), simple, also unison.
  - 1925, *Songs of Praise*, more hymn tunes and harmonizations.
  - 1928, *Te Deum* in G. Also *The Oxford Book of Carols*.
  - 1930, *Three Choral Hymns*, for Leith Hill Festival.
  - 1937, *Festival Te Deum* in F, for coronation of George VI.
  - 1939, complete Services in D minor.

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Between the Wars, 1920–39 (iii)

- Literary.
  - Very little between the wars.
  - *Nothing is here for tears* (Milton), unison, for death of George V.

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Late Works, 1940-1958 (i)

- Literary.
  - 1940, *Six Choral Songs (To Be Sung in Time of War)* (Shelley), unison.
  - 1942, *Valiant-for-truth* (Bunyan), from *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
  - 1943, *The New Commonwealth* (Harold Child), again *Pilgrim's Progress*.
  - 1951, *Sun, Moon, Stars, and Man* (Ursula Wood).
  - 1951, *Three Shakespeare Songs*.
  - 1953, *Silence and Music* (Ursula Wood), coronation madrigal.

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Late Works, 1940–1958 (ii)

- Folksongs.
  - 1942, *Nine Carols*, for TB, simple.
  - 1950, *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*, treble.
- Church.
  - 1947, *The Souls of the Righteous* and *The Voice out of the Whirlwind*.
  - 1948, *Prayer to the Father of Heaven* (Skelton).
  - 1953, coronation of Elizabeth II.
    - *O taste and see* and *The Old Hundredth Psalm Tune*.
  - 1954, *Hodie*, many excerpts (i.e., ‘The blessed son of God’).
  - 1956, *A Vision of Aeroplanes*

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## Conclusion

- A golden age for RVW and chamber choir.
- Explore online. Find your favorites!
- Emerald Ensemble concert, Saturday, November 12.
  - [www.EmeraldEnsemble.org](http://www.EmeraldEnsemble.org)

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April 23, 2022

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