

# VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Piano Quintet

Quintet in D major

Six Studies in English Folk Song

Romance for Viola and Piano

London Soloists Ensemble



## Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

### Piano Quintet • Romance • Quintet in D major • Six Studies in English Folk Song

Widely known for his orchestral and choral works, Ralph Vaughan Williams is rather less celebrated as a composer of music for reduced forces, yet he wrote chamber and instrumental pieces throughout his long creative life. Among his most significant examples are the *Phantasy Quintet* of 1912, the *String Quartet No. 2 in A minor* (1942-4) and the 1952 *Violin Sonata*, but perhaps the finest instance of his chamber writing may be found in the A. E. Houseman song cycle *On Wenlock Edge*, in its original 1909 version for tenor, piano and string quartet.

Vaughan Williams's earliest compositions, which date from 1895, when he left the Royal College of Music, to 1908, the year he went to Paris to study with Ravel, reveal a young creative artist attempting to establish his own personal musical language. Vaughan Williams withdrew or destroyed many works from that period, with the notable exception of songs such as *Linden Lea* (1901), *Silent Noon* (1903) and the Robert Louis Stevenson settings, *Songs of Travel* (1904) and two orchestral works – the 'symphonic impression', *In the Fen Country* (1904, revised 1905, 1907 and 1935) and the *Norfolk Rhapsody No. 1* of 1906.

During these crucial formative years, he also produced several substantial chamber works, including a *String Quartet in C minor* (1898) as well as the two quintets presented on this recording, none of which was published in his lifetime and none of which is thought to have been performed later than 1918. Their scores survived and were among those given to The British Library by the composer's widow following Vaughan Williams's death in 1958. At that time she placed an embargo on their performance but in the 1990s gave her consent to some of the early works being heard in concert. This change of heart was occasioned partly by the growing interest in previously unheard pieces by Vaughan Williams (most conspicuously evidenced by the public reclamation, at the turn of this century, of the *London Symphony* in its original, stylistically wide-ranging, 1913 version), and their vital rôle in the composer's creative development, a position analogous to the recently re-discovered early works of Benjamin Britten which have shed new light on his acknowledged canon. The scores of

Vaughan Williams's early chamber works were edited and prepared for performance and publication by Bernard Benoliel with Faber Music's editorial staff.

Completed in October 1903 and subsequently revised in 1904 and 1905, the *Piano Quintet in C minor* is scored for the same instrumental forces needed for Schubert's 'Trout' *Quintet*: piano, violin, viola, cello and double bass. It was first performed at the Aeolian Hall, London on 14th December 1905. In correspondence dating from January 1910 with E. J. Dent regarding a projected concert consisting entirely of his own works, Vaughan Williams suggests the *Quintet* as a suitable work for the occasion. The last known performance before the work was withdrawn took place on 8th June 1918, whilst the first modern performance was given by the RCM Chamber Ensemble on 19th November 1999 at the Royal College of Music, London in association with the conference, 'Vaughan Williams in a New Century'.

The opening movement's expansive principal theme and its opulent treatment are strongly reminiscent of Brahms, whilst the gently lilting secondary idea is more characteristic of its composer's mature style. The central slow movement's eloquent main theme bears a resemblance to the song *Silent Noon*, composed in the same year. The finale takes the form of a set of five variations on a theme which has already been alluded to in brief but dramatic appearances in the previous two movements. Fifty years later, Vaughan Williams used a variant of it as the thematic basis for the variations-finale of his *Violin Sonata*. All three movements of the *Quintet*, a warmly attractive and quietly confident piece, end softly.

It is not known when the *Romance for viola and piano* was written. The undated manuscript was discovered, along with others, among the composer's papers after his death. It may have been intended for the great viola player Lionel Tertis, for whom Vaughan Williams had composed two major works for the viola, *Flos Campi* in 1925 and the *Suite* in 1934. For publication in 1962 the viola part was edited by Bernard Shore and the piano part by Eric Gritton. They gave the first performance at a Macnaghten Concert in London on 19th January 1962. This short, single-movement work consists of two moderately paced outer sections contrasted

with a livelier, impassioned central episode. Throughout, Vaughan Williams exploits the viola's expressive qualities, whilst the piano accompaniment is subtly effective.

Dating from 1898, the *Quintet in D for clarinet, horn, violin, cello and piano* had its première in the Queen's (small) Hall on 5th June 1901 at the prestigious series of chamber concerts promoted by the clarinettist George A. Clinton, who also took part in the first performance. In her biography of her husband, published in 1964, Ursula Vaughan Williams mentions the composer himself acting as pianist in two performances of the work in February 1903 at the Oxford University Musical Club. Later that same year, he wrote to the music critic Edwin Evans (1871–1945), listing the *Quintet* as one of his 'most important works', along with the 1898 *String Quartet* and many of his subsequently suppressed works featuring orchestral forces, such as *The Garden of Proserpine*, also featuring a soprano soloist and chorus, (1899), the *Bucolic Suite* (1900), a *Fantasia* with solo piano, *Heroic Elegy and Triumphal Epilogue* (1902) and *Willow Wood*, with baritone soloist (1903).

Though, upon first acquaintance, the listener might find it somewhat difficult to guess the composer of the *D major Quintet*, it has an allure of its own and is graced by a light touch that embraces wit as well as playfulness. In the opening movement, a horn call initiates an elegant secondary theme in delicate chains of triplets, whilst the following *Intermezzo* features a memorably droll, waltz-like tune. A lyrical theme on the horn launches the slow movement, which includes a conscious reference to the slow movement of Brahms's *Fourth Symphony*; towards the end, the horn reiterates a falling phrase from its opening melody no fewer than twenty times, a strikingly poignant effect. The finale, which follows without a gap, is a lively, dance-like move-

ment. One of its main ideas, hearty and stomping, has distinctly folk-like quality. As befits such a positive and life-enhancing piece, its concluding bars are bold and affirmatory. The first modern performance of the *Quintet in D* was given by the Royal College of Music Chamber Ensemble at the British Library Conference Centre, London, on 20th February 2001.

Vaughan Williams's discovery and collection of English folk song was a major contribution to the development of his mature creative voice. Instances occur throughout his output from operas to orchestral fantasias and even in the hymn collections he edited. An example within his instrumental output is provided by the *Six Studies in English Folk Song*. Originally conceived for cello and piano, they were written for and dedicated to the cellist May Mukle, who first performed them with her sister Anne at the Scala Theatre, London on 4th June 1926 as part of that year's English Folk Dance Society Festival. There are arrangements for violin, viola, or, as on this recording, clarinet. Though short and direct, all six studies do not simply present the folk-songs starkly and unadorned, as Vaughan Williams introduces subtle elaborations on each of the themes, rendering them a true adjunct to his own body of work. Apart from the finale, which is lively and fleet-footed, the studies are measured in tempo, from moderately paced to slow. They are based on the following songs: 'Lovely on the Water' (the same tune Vaughan Williams used in the second of his 1913 choral work *Five English Folk Songs* under the title 'the Springtime of the Year'), 'Spurn Point', 'Van Diemen's Land', 'She borrowed some of her mother's gold', 'The Lady and the Dragon' and 'As I walked over London Bridge'.

Paul Conway



Photo: Claire Hulish

### London Soloists Ensemble

Formed in 2011 by some of Britain's most distinguished musicians, the London Soloists Ensemble have very quickly established themselves as a chamber group of superb quality. Appointed as 'Associate Ensemble' by St John's Smith Square in London, they began their first series of Sunday afternoon concerts at this prestigious venue in June 2013. In a busy first season they also broadcast for BBC Radio 3 and have appeared in festivals and arts centres throughout the United Kingdom.

One of the most distinguished British violinists of her generation, **Lorraine McAslan** studied at The Juilliard School in New York with Dorothy DeLay. She has appeared as soloist with major orchestras throughout Europe and was for several seasons first violin of the Maggini String Quartet. **Sarah-Jane Bradley** has established a distinguished international reputation as a solo violinist. As a former founder member of the Leopold String Trio and subsequently a member of the Sorrel Quartet, she has performed at some of the world's most prestigious festivals and is also known as a pioneer of new music for the viola with an ever growing list of new works written especially for her. **Karine Georgian**, Gold Medal winner of the Tchaikovsky Competition, is an internationally admired representative of the golden generation of Russian string players and has appeared as soloist with leading orchestras and conductors world-wide. *The New York Times* described **John Lenehan** as a pianist of "great flair and

virtuosity" and he has performed worldwide to critical acclaim as soloist and chamber musician. He is also in demand as an arranger and orchestrator. **Anthony Pike** was born in Seoul, Korea, and studied the clarinet in London with Julian Farrell, Dame Thea King and in Chicago with Robert Marcellus. He is principal clarinet of the English Chamber Orchestra and has performed concertos with them throughout the world.

The London Soloists Ensemble are joined for this recording by **Chris West** (double bass) and **Tim Jackson** (French horn). Chris West appears regularly as guest principal with many of Britain's major orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philharmonia, the Academy of St Martin-in-the-fields and the English Chamber Orchestra. The multi-talented Tim Jackson is principal horn of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. He is also in demand as a period instrument horn player and, as composer, his works (especially for brass ensemble) have been heard worldwide.

Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote chamber music throughout his long creative life. The *Piano Quintet in C minor* uses the same rich instrumentation as Schubert's 'Trout' Quintet, while the life-enhancing *Quintet in D major* has an alluring wit and playfulness of its own. Vaughan Williams's discovery of English folk song contributed greatly to his mature creative voice, the *Six Studies* introducing subtle elaborations on each of the themes, while the origins of the undated but expressive *Romance* remain a mystery.



## Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872–1958)

|   |  |              |   |  |             |
|---|--|--------------|---|--|-------------|
| <b>Piano Quintet in C minor</b><br>(1903, rev. 1904, 1905)  |  | <b>31:23</b> | <b>Six Studies in English Folk Song</b><br>(1926) (version for clarinet<br>and piano) |  | <b>8:55</b> |
| <b>1</b> I. Allegro con fuoco   |  | 10:13        | <b>9</b> I. Adagio ('Lovely on the Water')  |  | 1:21        |
| <b>2</b> II. Andante  |  | 10:46        | <b>10</b> II. Andante sostenuto ('Spurn<br>Point')                                    |  | 1:12        |
| <b>3</b> III. Fantasia, quasi variazioni  |  | 10:19        | <b>11</b> III. Larghetto ('Van Dieman's<br>Land')                                     |  | 1:43        |
| <b>4</b> <b>Romance for Viola and Piano</b><br>(ed. 1962 Bernard Shore and<br>Eric Gritton)       |  | <b>6:47</b>  | <b>12</b> IV. Lento ('She Borrowed Some<br>of her Mother's Gold')                     |  | 1:42        |
| <b>Quintet in D major,</b><br><b>for violin, cello, clarinet, horn</b><br><b>and piano (1898)</b> |  | <b>25:37</b> | <b>13</b> V. Andante tranquillo ('The Lady<br>and the Dragon')                        |  | 1:52        |
| <b>5</b> I. Allegro moderato  |  | 7:01         | <b>14</b> VI. Allegro vivace ('As I Walked<br>over London Bridge')                    |  | 0:56        |
| <b>6</b> II. Intermezzo: Allegretto   |  | 3:55         |   |  |             |
| <b>7</b> III. Andantino   |  | 7:59         |   |  |             |
| <b>8</b> IV. Finale: Allegro molto  |  | 6:31         |   |  |             |

### London Soloists Ensemble

Lorraine McAslan, Violin <sup>1-3, 5-8</sup> • Sarah-Jane Bradley, Viola <sup>1-3, 4</sup>  
 Karine Georgian, Cello <sup>1-3, 5-8</sup> • John Lenehan, Piano <sup>1-14</sup> • Anthony Pike, Clarinet <sup>5-14</sup>  
*With:* Chris West, Double Bass <sup>1-3</sup> • Tim Jackson, French Horn <sup>5-8</sup>

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