



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Willow-Wood

The Sons of Light
Toward the
Unknown Region
Five Variants of
Dives and Lazarus

Roderick Williams, Baritone Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra David Lloyd-Jones

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) Willow-Wood • Toward the Unknown Region • The Sons of Light

The poems of the American Walt Whitman (1819-1892) were published in Leaves of Grass, a collected works which in successive editions over 35 years from 1855 added new poems at each appearance. Vaughan Williams may have been first introduced to Whitman by his teacher Stanford, who in his pioneering Elegiac Ode of 1884 had been the first significant British composer to respond to Whitman's visionary non-sectarian stanzas and the freedom of his verse. Ursula Vaughan Williams tells us that from 1902 or 1903 Leaves of Grass in various editions was 'his constant companion'. The outcome of this absorption was A Sea Symphony, gradually brought into focus over seven years and first heard in 1910. A companion piece, started later but completed sooner, was Toward the Unknown Region. Vaughan Williams remembered that when he and his friend Gustav Holst had both considered themselves 'stuck', they decided they should both set the same Whitman text from 'Whispers of Heavenly Death' and jointly select the winner. They duly awarded the palm to Vaughan Williams for this work. It was first performed at the Leeds Festival on 10th October 1907 with the composer conducting (doubtless the Festival conductor, Stanford, insisted that his pupil should conduct his own work), but when, two months later, it first appeared in London at the Royal College of Music on 10th December 1907 Stanford was on the podium.

Vaughan Williams referred to the work as a "song for chorus and orchestra" and it was announced thus at the festival. Hubert Foss has pointed out that the opening melody is almost identical to 'Love's Last Gift', the final song of Vaughan Williams's Rossetti sequence *The House of Life* which included his popular song 'Silent Noon'. Percy Young has also drawn our attention to another musical motif that Vaughan Williams subsumes

into his score when he looks to the psalm tune *Sine Nomine* 'and reaches a blazing climax in the final bars, emblematic of the ultimate triumph of the soul's destiny'.

The cantata Willow-Wood for baritone, women's voices and orchestra first appeared as a scena for baritone and piano in March 1903 when it was sung by Campbell McInnes in a concert at St James's Hall, Piccadilly. Again Vaughan Williams set words from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sequence The House of Life. The genesis of these early works seems to be interrelated, and Michael Kennedy has drawn our attention to a motif, also in the song 'Love's Last Gift', which this time became the opening of Willow-Wood.

Vaughan Williams orchestrated Willow-Wood soon after the first performance and later added an ad.lib. women's chorus (much of it wordless), and in this form it was performed at the Music League Festival in Liverpool on 25th September 1909, for which Breitkopf and Härtel printed the vocal score. There the soloist was the celebrated baritone Frederic Austin, and the conductor the Welsh choral conductor Harry Evans. Despite some positive press notices and the fact that the vocal score had been published, it has not been heard again until now. Yet the composer clearly retained an affection for it; even three years before his death he was attempting to get it republished.

Willow-Wood is the most substantial sequence in The House of Life, consisting of four interlinked sonnets. Commentators have attempted a number of interpretations of the richly-perfumed but opaque imagery. However, a clue is given by the poet himself in an article he wrote in 1871. Referring to the first poem only, Rossetti stated: 'the sonnet describes a dream or trance of divided love momentarily re-united by the

longing fancy; and in the imagery of the dream, the face of the beloved rises through deep dark waters to kiss the lover'. Vaughan Williams seems to have had no problem in coming to terms with the poems. His setting creates the musical equivalent of a Pre-Raphaelite tableau in which the evocative poetic images are translated into luxuriant textures. The work is a fine extended vehicle for the baritone whose widely-ranging melodic line demonstrates the composer's close affinity with the human voice.

Willow-Wood owes much of its impact to the orchestra and the atmosphere associated with the women's choir, especially when they vocalise, a Vaughan Williams fingerprint we are now familiar with from so many scores. Like the atmospheric recently re-discovered Nocturne (more from Whitman's Whispers of Heavenly Death) for baritone and orchestra, it is clear Vaughan Williams already had a formidable orchestral technique which in its day, just before Debussy and Ravel were generally heard in Britain, must have been considered very advanced and possibly was not treated sympathetically by Willow-Wood's no-nonsense first conductor.

In 1946, the Musicians Benevolent Fund, giving effect to a long-standing aspiration of the recently deceased Sir Henry Wood, revived regular annual St Cecilia Day services in London, initially at St Sepulchre's without Newgate on Holborn Viaduct. From 1947 new works were commissioned every year, starting with the Vaughan Williams motet *The Voice Out of the Whirtwind*, though then with organ accompaniment. The choir assembled consisted of representatives from His Majesty's Chapels Royal and Canterbury Cathedral, as well as St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, underlining the festival's standing from the outset. It was first performed at St Sepulchre's on 22nd November 1947.

Vaughan Williams's sturdy motet takes words from

the book of Job as God speaks to Job from out of the whirlwind. He adapted the music from the 'Galliard of the Sons of the Morning' in scene VIII of his 'masque for dancing', Job, and later orchestrated it for the Leith Hill Festival, at Dorking on 16th June 1951. It is remarkable how well the words fit what was intended as a balletic score, making one wonder how far Vaughan Williams had associated words and music in the first place.

Written for the New York World's Fair, Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus' was first performed at Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, on 10th June 1939. The same concert saw the first performance of Sir Arthur Bliss's barn-storming Piano Concerto, and was preceded by Walter Piston's noisy orchestral Prelude and Fugue. The American announcer, having trouble with the pronunciation of 'Dives', interpreted as a single syllable, contented himself with 'Five Variants of an old English carol'.

Vaughan Williams writes in the score: 'These variants are not exact replicas of original tunes, but rather reminiscent of various versions in my own collection and those of others.' While the nearest example listed by the folk-song collector Cecil Sharp was collected at the Ross Workhouse, Herefordshire, in 1921, in fact the tune can be traced to the sixteenth century as a carol sung to the words 'Come all ye faithful Christians' which Vaughan Williams had known from childhood. Each of the five variants was suggested by a different version of the tune.

The first British performance came on 1st November 1939 at the Colston Hall in Bristol, where the BBC Symphony Orchestra had been evacuated on the outbreak of war. Like the *Tallis Fantasia* it is a score which works its own magic in a large space, and touchingly, it was also played in Westminster Abbey on the interment of Vaughan Williams's ashes on 19th September 1958.

In 1950 the viola player Bernard Shore, in his

capacity as Staff Inspector of Schools in Music at the Ministry of Education, on behalf of the Schools Music Association, asked Vaughan Williams if he would write a work for a large choir of schoolchildren to be performed with orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall at their second festival in 1951. Vaughan Williams at first refused, claiming he knew nothing about writing for childrens' choirs but then agreed, possibly realising he would have many teenagers whose voices had broken, and produced his cantata *The Sons of Light*, scored for four-part chorus, making no concessions to the age of his performers. The performance with a massed young people's choir of over a thousand, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult was on 6th May 1951.

In no way does Vaughan Williams write down in this invigorating and little-known score, and surely it is only its association in the composer's catalogue of works with a children's choir that has made it possibly the least heard of his major works. The words were specially written by Ursula Wood, soon to become Ursula Vaughan Williams, in an ingenious spin on the creation story which starts

with the passage of the sun as expressed in Greek myths, the celebratory marching character of much of the movement announced and decorated by fanfares. It ends with a contrasting night piece, as the moon crosses the sky, followed by a postlude telling of the nocturnal march of the zodiac in the heavens heralding the magical distant orchestral fading of the light. The dancing central scherzo, The Song of the Zodiac, expands on the words of the close of the previous movement, with a celebration of the signs of the zodiac, typically contrasting bucolic revels painted in riotous orchestral colour and the onomatopoeia of the waters and the autumn gales which find ready illustration in Vaughan Williams's orchestral palette. The final movement. The Messengers of Speech, returning to the creation story as told in the heavens, now celebrates the letters of the alphabet, because as the poet puts it 'nothing can exist until it is named'. The characteristic choral march at 'This is the morning of the sons of light' is surrounded by fanfares as the music ends in rejoicing.

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Roderick Williams

The British baritone Roderick Williams is a highly-versatile, intelligent and musical artist, embracing a wide range of rôles and repertoire. Recent concerts include appearances with the Deutsches Sinfonie Orchester Berlin, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Philharmonic, Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestre de Paris and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France with conductors including Hickox, Manze, Handley, Brabbins, Davis and Pletney. His successes include the world première of Birtwistle's The Ring Dance of the Nazarene with VARA Radio (repeated at the 2004 BBC Proms.) Henze's Elegy for Young Lovers with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and Elgar's Dream of Gerontius with both the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse. Recent opera rôles include the title rôle in Don Giovanni and Guglielmo in Così fan tutte, both for Opera North. Other rôles include the Count in The Marriage of Figaro, Figaro in The Barber of Seville, Marcello in La Bohème and Prince André in War and Peace. World premières include David Sawer's From Morning Till Midnight and Martin Butler's A Better Place, both for English National Opera, his début with Netherlands Opera in Alexander Knaifel's Alice in Wonderland, Sally Beamish's Monster with Scottish Opera, and Michel van der Aa's After Life (Netherlands Opera). Roderick Williams has a wide experience of recital work, including engagements at the Wigmore Hall, and on BBC Radio 3. His many recordings include recently-released discs of Lennox Berkeley's operas The Dinner Engagement and Ruth with Richard Hickox and, for Naxos, a disc of Finzi songs with Iain Burnside (Naxos 8.557644).

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir

Chorus Master: Ian Tracy

With its 165-year tradition, and reputation for versatility, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir has always been central to the life of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society. Its members are drawn from a wide range of occupations in business, medicine, education, industry and many other fields, and travel from all parts of Merseyside, and beyond, to take part in the choir's activities. Its repertoire covers all periods and styles from Bach to newly commissioned works, with full symphony orchestra and unaccompanied, and it also plays a leading rôle in the famous Liverpool Carol Concerts. As well as performing in many of the major concert venues in the North-West and Midlands, the choir has appeared regularly in the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall, and took part, from outside Liverpool's St George's Hall, in the live Last Night link-up to London in the 'Proms in the Park' in 2000 and 2001. It has sung with the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC Philharmonic, and has undertaken several foreign tours, both independently and with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, singing in venues throughout Spain and France, and taking part in festivals in Germany and The Netherlands. Ian Tracey has been Chorus Master since 1985 and has travelled with the choir both in Britain and abroad.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra gives over sixty concerts from September to June in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall and presents concerts throughout the United Kingdom, in addition to tours abroad. Members of the orchestra are involved in a number of innovative community education projects. One of the oldest concert-giving organizations in the world, the RLPO dates back to 1840. In 1957 it acquired the title 'Royal', and in 1991 it was the first organization to be granted the freedom of the City of Liverpool. The first professional conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic, in 1844, was Jakob Zeugheer, followed by Alfred Mellon, Max Bruch, Charles Hallé, Frederic Hymen Cowen, and Thomas Beecham. In 1942 Malcolm Sargent became resident conductor, followed in 1948 by Hugo Rignold as music director. Subsequent incumbents have included Efrem Kurtz and John Pritchard, Walter Weller, David Atherton, Marek Janowski and Libor Pešek, the last appointment bringing a continuing connection with the Czech Republic. He was followed by Petr Altrichter, and Gerard Schwarz was appointed music director in 2001.

David Lloyd-Jones

David Lloyd-Jones began his professional career in 1959 on the music staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and soon became much in demand as a freelance conductor for orchestral and choral concerts, opera, BBC broadcasts and TV studio opera productions. He has appeared at the Royal Opera House (Boris Godunov with both Christoff and Ghaiurov), Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera and the Wexford, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Leeds Festivals, and with the major British orchestras. In 1972 he was appointed Assistant Music Director at English National Opera, and during his time there conducted an extensive repertory which included, in addition to all the standard operas, Die Meistersinger, Katya Kabanova, and the British stage première of Prokofiev's War and Peace. In 1978, at the invitation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, he founded a new full-time opera company, Opera North, with its own orchestra, the English Northern Philharmonia, of which he became Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, During his twelve seasons with the company he conducted fifty different new productions, including The Trojans, Prince Igor, The Midsummer Marriage (Tippett), and the British stage première of Strauss's Daphne. He also conducted numerous orchestral concerts, including festival appearances in France and Germany. He has made many successful recordings of British and Russian music, and has an extensive career in the concerthall and opera-house that takes him to leading musical centres throughout Central Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Israel, Australia, Japan, Canada and the Americas. His highly acclaimed cycle of Bax's symphonies and tone poems for Naxos (Gramophone Award) was completed in the autumn of 2003.

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1 TOWARD THE UNKNOWN REGION

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Darest thou now O soul, Walk out with me toward the unknown region, Where neither ground is for 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 undreamed 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 bounding 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 fulfi O soul

2 WILLOW-WOOD

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882)

T

I sat with Love upon a woodside well, Leaning across the water, I and he; Nor ever did he speak nor looked at me, But touched his lute wherein was audible The certain secret thing he had to tell: Only our mirrored eyes met silently In the low wave; and that sound came to be The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell. And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers; And with his foot and with his wing-feathers He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth.

Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair, And as I stooped, her own lips rising there Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth.

П

And now Love sang: but his was such a song, So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free, As souls disused in deaths' sterility May sing when the new birthday tarries long. And I was made aware of a dumb throng That stood aloof, one form by every tree, All mournful forms, for each was I or she, The shades of those our days that had no tongue.

They looked on us, and knew us and were known; While fast together, alive from the abyss, Clung the soul-wrung implacable close kiss; And pity of self through all made broken moan Which said, "For once, for once, for once alone!" And still Love sang, and what he sang was this: —

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"O ye, all ye that walk in Willow-wood,
That walk with hollow faces burning white;
What fathom-depth of soul-struck widowhood,
What long, what longer hours, one lifelong night,
Ere ye again, who so in vain have wooed
Your last hope lost, who so in vain invite
Your lips to that their unforgotten food,
Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light!

Alas! the bitter banks in Willow-wood, With tear-spurge wan,

with blood-wort burning red: Alas! if ever such a pillow could Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead,— Better all life forget her than this thing, That Willow-wood should hold her wandering!"

IV

So sang he: and as meeting rose and rose Together cling through the wind's wellaway Nor change at once, yet near the end of day The leaves drop loosened

where the heart-stain glows,-

So when the song died did the kiss unclose; And her face fell back drowned, and was as grey As its grey eyes; and if it ever may Meet mine again I know not if Love knows.

Only I know that I leaned low and drank A long draught from the water where she sank, Her breath and all her tears and all her soul: And as I leaned, I know I felt Love's face Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace, Till both our heads were in his aureole.

3 THE VOICE OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND Texts taken from the Book of Job

38: 1 - 11

- Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said.
- 2. Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?
- 3. Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

- 4. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.
- 5. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?
- 6. Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;
- 7. When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
- 8. Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb?
- 9. When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it,
- 10. And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors,
- 11. And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?

38 16-17

16. Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?

17. Have the gates of death been opened unto

17. Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?

40: 7-10 & 14

- Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
- 8. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?
- 9. Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?
- 10. Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty.
- 14. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.

THE SONS OF LIGHT

Ursula Wood (b. 1911)

5 I Darkness and Light

Fair, strong and splendid, summoned for delight, creatures released from bondage, Dark and Light, sprang out of troubled chaos, depth and height, the one all shadow, the other all things bright, to go their separate ways of day and night.

Then the earth from water rose, bare hill and empty plain: then the seas by shores were bound, then came both dew and rain. The elements were set where nothing was before, strong pillars to uphold the world steadfast evermore.

First of light's children, the horses of the sun, flame plumed wings and hooves of fire, pawing the clouds, tossing unbridled heads waiting a charioteer before they run, waiting a god to master all their power, stand on the rim of morning, champing to be away across the sky to run the course of day.

Now mount plumed god, and drive your shining team up towards noon, climb the great arc of sky: the dazzled plains lie shadowless below until you turn downhill and shadows stream longer and longer, and cool on earth they lie till last and furthest ocean takes your rein, stables your weary steeds until day breaks again. Rise moon, cold crescent of reflected fire, make night all silver now gold day is done, shine on dark waters of each summer pool, shine on the ice where mountain ranges tower: step lightly as you walk the sky alone above the sleeping forests where musks

and spices grow, above swan-feathered plains of arctic snow.

Each month is marked with a starry sign. a long procession they march in line. They cross the night and year by year in order due they reappear. The milky way is broad and clear: Charles's wain and Cassiopeia, hunter and hero. the empty chair and the crown of stars are gathered there. Light climbs the darkness with stars that lie in constellation and galaxy. Unnamed they wait till man arise. steersman and shepherd with watching eyes that by land and water will see the skies.

Man will live by the sun and the changing moon and the distant stars till Time is done.

6 II The song of the Zodiac

Every night of the year there shines one of the Zodiac's twelve signs

Run, young Ram, through fields of spring, cloud meadows high, the story begins when you cross the sky. Horns white curved like a crescent moon, golden ring, bright eye, summer comes soon when the Bull goes by.

Warrior Twins, brother and brother, adventuring far ride by each other as star beside star. Sideways he goes, sideways he will go in peace or war, not fast, not slow, so all Crabs are.

Come summer Lion, come tawny beast stalk through the night from sleep released, come, Lion, proud and bright. Harvest comes when the Virgin follows, the dew is white when the swallows gather for flight.

Magic is balanced in the Scales, swing high, swing low, the autumn gales and all winds blow.

Mailed Scorpion has a deadly sting, as sharp as woe, and he is king of creeping ones below.

Brave Archer, bow bent in air, take aim, what will you slay?
What lurking game at the edge of the day?
Folly and folly shall dance with you, caper, be gay, frisk all night through, dance Goat, while you may.

Is it the water of life you hold
Water Bearer, in your jar,
for young and old,
carried from far?
Silver linked swimmers, shimmer of scales,
dark weed, cool fins,
thus ends the tale
that the Ram begins.
Every night of the year there shines
one of the Zodiac's twelve signs.

7 III The Messengers of Speech

Now came winged messengers to be man's speech, serene and splendid, thronging all the sky with songs and stories and legends to be told of man's dominion and his majesty.

Before Time started in Time's words they spoke, as if man's voice already cried from far,

from the deep thought wherein he slept still two days younger than the morning star. This is the morning of the sons of light, rejoice because they start upon their way; singing they go, each clothed in his own day, their orbits span the terrors of the height, swifter than wind, as swift as thought, their flight.

Sing and rejoice, vast darkness, that you share in equal splendour and in equal power the glory of creation's earliest hour. Light shines in scattered jewels that you wear, and sleep the gift that lies within your care.

Light shall be light for ever and the darkness night, Man shall awake and speak their names aloud and set a name on fire and wind and cloud from whence all living creatures take delight. Rejoice, man .stands among the sons of light.

> Thanks to Ursula Vaughan Williams for permission to reproduce the words of The Sons of Light.



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5 Darkness and Light 9:07
6 The Song of the Zodiac 6:10
7 The Messengers of Speech 4:06
Roderick Williams, Baritone
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra
David Lloyd-Jones

This disc features the world première recording of the cantata Willow-Wood, a little known yet substantial work by the great British composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams. Scored for baritone, women's choir and orchestra, Willow-Wood is a luxuriant setting of part of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sequence The House of Life. Unrecorded since the LP era, the choral

cantata The Sons of Light is a dazzling depiction of the passing of the sun, with many of

the magical harmonic and rhythmical effects for which Vaughan Williams was renowned.

Ralph

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

(1872-1958)

1 Toward the Unknown Region (Song for Chorus and Orchestra)

4 Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus (for Strings and Harp)

The Sons of Light (Cantata for Chorus and Orchestra)

2 Willow-Wood *(Cantata for Baritone and Orchestra)

3 The Voice out of the Whirlwind

(Motet for Chorus and Orchestra)

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VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:

Willow-Wood



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11:38 19:24

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