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## RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, O.M.

DR. RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS died on August 26th, 1958, in his eighty-sixth year. The end came peacefully and suddenly. He spent his last day working in his study, thus rounding off a complete life, in which he had left no major work unfinished. His Ninth Symphony had received its first performance on April 2nd, 1958.

He was born on October 12th, 1872, at the village of Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, where his father was vicar. On his father's death three years later he went with his mother to her family home in Surrey where he was brought up. The English countryside had a great appeal for him, as may be readily perceived in his music, but he was a Londoner at heart and he spent most of his adult years in London. He was descended on his mother's side from the great English families of Wedgwood and Darwin: Charles Darwin was his great-uncle. His father's forebears numbered some eminent members of the legal profession.

Ralph Vaughan Williams received a conventional English education, going to public school (Charterhouse) and to university (Trinity College, Cambridge), but in between he spent two years at the Royal College of Music and he returned there for further study after leaving the University. He also worked for a time with Max Bruch in Berlin and with Ravel in Paris. For many years he taught composition at the Royal College of Music.

His first contact with living folk song came in 1904 when he heard a local shepherd in an East Anglian village sing "Through Bushes and Briars," one of the most beautiful of English folk songs. From that time onward he devoted much time to the collecting of folk songs. In them he recognised the musical genius of the English people and they became the foundation on which he built the structure of his own great creative work.

He was not content merely to collect the songs or to use them as raw material for his own compositions, but together with his friend Cecil Sharp he strove to bring them back once again into the everyday lives of the people. He served on the committees of the Folk-Song Society and the English Folk Dance Society and continued on the committee of the English Folk Dance and Song Society when the two earlier societies were amalgamated. He became President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 1946.

Through his pianoforte accompaniments and his choral and instrumental arrangements he gained for English folk music the respect and love of professional musician and amateur alike. In his folk song settings he showed the true humility of greatness in that he sought to reveal the intrinsic beauty of the song and never allowed his musical invention to stand in its way. Members of the IFMC Conference in London in 1952 will remember the performance at the Royal Festival Hall of his cantata, *The Four Seasons*, which was originally written for village choirs. In this connection one may mention that he was much concerned with the musical needs of the ordinary man, as witness his editorship of the *English Hymnal* and his direction of the annual festival at Leith Hill, the home of his mother's family, in which he conducted amateur choirs from the neighbouring countryside in the *St. Matthew Passion* and other great works.

He wrote no book entirely devoted to folk music, but he contributed a number of articles on the subject, and there are not many of his writings in which it remains far out of sight. His fullest exposition is to be found in his *National Music* (Oxford

University Press, 1934), a series of lectures given at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. He had a full appreciation of the scholarly and scientific implications of folk music, but it was as a living art form that it made its appeal to him and he never wearied of proclaiming its beauties.

Of his own music, which covers almost every variety of form—including symphonic and choral works, chamber music, a Mass, opera, ballet and film music—this is not the place to give a general account, for we are here chiefly concerned with its relation to folk music. It was only in a few of his original compositions that he introduced actual folk themes and he did not, as is sometimes supposed, attempt to imitate the folk style; but the idiom of English folk music was to him the point of departure from which he set forth on his discovery of new forms whereby to express his own musical thought. He is still too close for us to be able to evaluate his music: that is a matter for future generations. We can, however, bear testimony to what it means to us in the present day; and we can say that it seems to give expression to the whole gamut of human emotion—to joy and sorrow, hope and longing; and that in his greatest works it transcends the limits of immediate experience and carries us into the spiritual realms of timeless truth.

Vaughan Williams was awarded the Order of Merit in 1935, and received many other honours in his lifetime. A further recognition of his greatness came after his death, when his ashes were interred in Westminster Abbey to lie near the remains of Purcell and Handel.

He was twice married. His first wife, who died in 1951, was Adeline Fisher, sister of the historian, H. A. L. Fisher. His second wife, who survives him, is a poet who, under the name of Ursula Wood, has published several volumes of verse and contributed the words for some of his later choral works.

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Vaughan Williams did most to refute the old German fallacy of “Das Land ohne Musik.” He ennobled folk song with his marvellous settings; he ennobled his own style with the spirit of folk song. Thus he renewed English music by returning to old tradition. He changed the aspect of English music, making it more English and at the same time more accessible to other peoples. He could be original without being sophisticated. His death is a great loss but he leaves us a rich heritage.

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

My sister and I were much grieved to hear about the loss of our President, the great Ralph Vaughan Williams. It is a loss not only for England, but also for humanity.

We think that all members of the IFMC will join you in the sorrow for a man of wisdom, of understanding, of unprejudiced erudition and of a human concern in the affairs and welfare of our Council. To have had such a man as the head of our organisation means not only an honour, but also a really happy circumstance. For his moral support and his other generous assistance all those wishing prosperity to the IFMC ought to be grateful to him.

*Extract from a letter received from Professor Danica S. Janković of Belgrade.*

There was no worthy object either for music or for freedom of the spirit which Ralph Vaughan Williams did not actively support, and especially near to his heart was folk song. He was an internationalist at heart rather than in practice, for he was neither a great linguist nor a great committee man: nor had he any sympathy with politics wrapped as a deceitful napkin round music. With R.V.W. anywhere about the place men could feel safe—"under the shadow of his wings" one might say.

His style in the musical treatment of English folk songs was individual and changed very little over the years: he found his manner almost at once and there seemed to be no need for further experiment. He had studied a wide range of possible modal harmonies, and by the experience of his editorial work he knew what was "correct" and also effective.

It must be added that he never shirked or left to anyone else the smallest detail of any project which he had undertaken.

There is nothing for tears in his departure: he had worked hard all his life first to gain, and thereafter to maintain his freedom of individual style in music. He was not "born free": with a great labour he paid for this freedom and he has entered into his rightful heritage.

STEUART WILSON

## VAUGHAN WILLIAMS MEMORIAL

We believe that many members of the IFMC will welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to the memory of our late President and to express their gratitude for his work. We therefore call attention to the memorial which is being raised to him in his own country. This will take the form of endowing the Folk Music Library at Cecil Sharp House (the headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society) which is henceforth to be known as the VAUGHAN WILLIAMS MEMORIAL LIBRARY.

The Library, in which is incorporated Cecil Sharp's personal library, is the most comprehensive repository in existence of the folk music of the British people. It contains many rare and valuable books besides recordings and manuscripts including Vaughan Williams's own folk music collection. It also has a representative collection of books relating to the folk music of other countries.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. He attached great importance to the upkeep and extension of its Library and shortly before his death he launched an appeal for its endowment.

His fellow-musicians in Great Britain regard it as appropriate that his memorial should be identified with the means of furthering the research in and the practice of folk music to which he himself owed such great inspiration.

It is a happy coincidence that the raising of the memorial to Ralph Vaughan Williams falls in the year in which the centenary of the birth of Cecil Sharp, the great collector of English folk music, will be celebrated.

The promoters of the memorial aim at raising a fund at £50,000 which will, it is estimated, maintain the Library in perpetuity.

Donations will be gratefully received by the Secretary, Vaughan Williams Memorial Fund, Cecil Sharp House, 2, Regent's Park Road, London, N.W.1, England.