

## Montgomery Philharmonic 2016 - 17 Our 11th Season – Inspired by...

### Concert 4, Sunday, March 26, 2017 – Inspired by Nature

Borodin | Vaughan Williams | Holst

#### About Ralph Vaughan Williams –

Ralph Vaughan Williams' life spanned two worlds. His music is most often described as being from the English pastoral school—depicting the idyllic part of the English countryside and life. Because he was not a groundbreaker as a composer, unless one listens to his nine symphonies one doesn't have the opportunity to discover his music as visionary, provocative, and universal.

His father died when Ralph (rhymes with *safe*) was quite young, and he and his mother were forced to move to his paternal grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood's manor, Leith Hill. Wedgwood saw to it that his grandson was properly schooled, and as a teenager Vaughan Williams enrolled in a course of history and music study at Trinity College, Cambridge; he finished his schooling at the Royal College of Music, London. Vaughan Williams married Adeline Fisher and soon after moved to Berlin to study composition with Max Bruch. Later, he worked with Maurice Ravel, even though Ravel was three years younger than he was.

World War I interrupted his composing. He served as an ambulance orderly in the war, and his subsequent compositions were shaped by what he saw while tending the wounded on French battlefields. After the Armistice, he composed chamber music, choral works, film scores, songs, symphonies, three full-length operas, and a one-act opera (*Riders to the Sea*).

Sir Michael Tippett describes Vaughan Williams' music in the following way: "In essence, VW had created a brand: 'He made what *he* thought of as English music'." This was done through extensive collecting of English folk songs, which eventually made their way in various forms into his major works. But, it was more than that. Vaughan Williams' music had an aural flavor that folks came to believe as English music

- **Born:** October 12, 1872, Gloucestershire, England
- **Died:** August 26, 1958, London, England
- **Compositions:** 6 operas, incidental music to 5 plays, 5 ballets, 9 symphonies, 6 tone poems, 2 rhapsodies, 13 concerti for various instruments, 20 works for chorus and orchestra – several with soloists, 4 hymn–tune cycles, 28 works for voice and piano, 4 song cycles, 16 chamber works for various instrument combinations 11 works or cycles for keyboard, 10 film scores, 3 radio scores, 8 works for band
- **Parents:** Reverend Arthur Vaughan Williams and Margaret Vaughan Williams

#### *The Lark Ascending* (1920) – Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Vaughan Williams knew of the poem *The Lark Ascending* by George Meredith, a 122-line poem about the song of the skylark that was written in 1881. Vaughan Williams lived most of his life near Dorking, Surrey, not far from Meredith's Box Hill home. He used Meredith's poem as a starting point to depict freedom of flight with soaring melodic material for both the solo point and the orchestral parts. The orchestration is brilliant, with all of the drama and the gracefulness of a skylark's song hovering to great heights. The harmony avoids a tonal center and the two cadenzas for solo violin give the piece an ethereal feeling.

Vaughan Williams originally wrote the work for violin and piano in 1914, and in 1920 he scored it for violin and chamber orchestra. The work was premiered in 1920 by Marie Hall, the woman for whom it was written, after a delay because of the outbreak of World War I.

On paper, the piece looks simple, but it is one of the most difficult pieces to play in violin literature because it must sound effortless and free. In the United Kingdom, *The Lark Ascending* is a favorite among concertgoers. In fact, in 2014 *The Guardian* newspaper took a poll asking concertgoers to nominate their favorite piece. *The Lark Ascending* received the most votes, more than for works by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and other great composers.

The following portion of the poem inspired the work and is inscribed on the flyleaf of the original publication of the work:

He rises and begins to round,  
He drops the silver chain of sound,  
Of many links without a break,  
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.

For singing till his heaven fills,  
'Tis love of earth that he instils,  
And ever winging up and up,  
Our valley is his golden cup  
And he the wine which overflows  
to lift us with him as he goes.

Till lost on his aerial rings  
In light, and then the fancy sings.

**Instrumentation** – strings

#### Artifacts –

Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1920 –

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph\\_Vaughan\\_Williams#/media/File:Vaughan-williams-hoppé.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Vaughan_Williams#/media/File:Vaughan-williams-hoppé.jpg)



1. Vaughan Williams: Tallia Fantasia, Fantasia on Greensleeves & The Lark Ascending - Academy of St. Martin in the Fields & Sir Neville Marriner
2. Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 6, The Lark Ascending, Fantasia on a Theme By Thomas Tallis - BBC Symphony Orchestra, Sir Andrew Davis & Tasmin Little
3. Elgar: Enigma Variations - Vaughan Williams: The Lark Ascending - Vernon Handley & Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



1. Vaughan Williams
2. Vaughan Williams
3. O Thou Transcendent: The Life of Ralph Vaughan Williams
4. The Lark Ascending: Full score