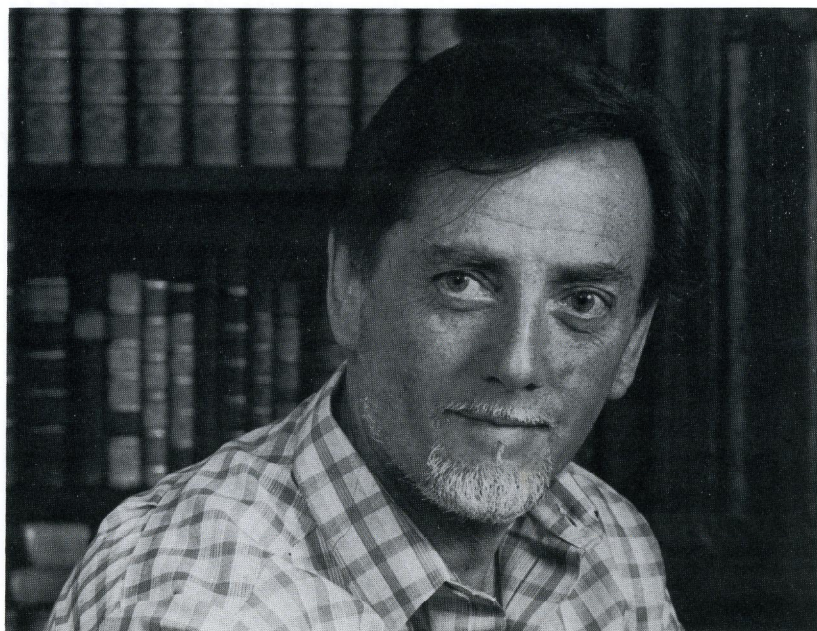


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Bryden Thomson

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DIGITAL

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Norfolk Rhapsody · In the Fen Country
Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis
5 Variants of "Dives and Lazarus"

LONDON
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

conducted by
BRYDEN THOMSON



Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

- 1 **NORFOLK RHAPSODY No. 1 in E minor** (11:45)
- 2 **IN THE FEN COUNTRY** (17:40)
Symphonic Impression
- 3 **FANTASIA ON A THEME BY THOMAS TALLIS**
for Double Stringed Orchestra (16:08)
- 4 **5 VARIANTS OF 'DIVES AND LAZARUS'**
for String Orchestra and Harp (13:27)
Harp, Skaila Kanga

TT = 59:15

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Leader, David Nolan
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It was at the age of thirty-six that Vaughan Williams went to Paris for a period of study with Ravel. He later referred to it as his 'attack of French fever', but this could not gainsay the importance to him of the French experience — nor did he intend it to; he knew full well how new horizons and expressive possibilities were opened up to him by his contact with Ravel and other 'musiciens français'. In fact the direction Vaughan Williams's music had been taking paralleled, in some important respects, Debussy's own.

As is mentioned below, the Tallis Fantasia was produced on his return from Paris, as was *On Wenlock Edge*, two works which established him as one of the most eminent composers of the day.

At the end of 1903 Vaughan Williams noted down the beautiful folk-song 'Bushes and Briars' from the singing of an Essex shepherd. With other similar songs it was an experience essential to the formation of the composer's personal style.

The two main tunes in the **Norfolk Rhapsody in E minor** were collected from two Norfolk fishermen in January 1905. The first is 'The Captain's Apprentice' and the second, 'On board the Ninety-Eight', tells of a youth pressed into naval service who ended his life as a pensioner at Greenwich.

The Rhapsody opens softly with a solo viola passage that becomes 'The Captain's Apprentice', and this is developed with other material. The second tune, 'On board the Ninety-Eight', is then given out and repeated with counter-melodies before a final section in which the first tune is recalled, though by inference rather than positive restatement. The economical length of the piece and the undoubted effectiveness of its scoring has ensured its survival when other rhapsodical works of the period proved less enduring.

In The Fen Country was Vaughan Williams's first work for orchestra and follows his experiences collecting folk-songs in East Anglia in 1904. The work was revised in 1905 and 1907 and the orchestration was revised in 1935. The scoring is imaginative and makes use of a third flute, cor anglais

and bass clarinet in addition to the standard forces.

During the course of this 'Symphonic Impression' (as it was sub-titled), the main melody is developed from its original, unadorned statement into textures of some complexity. Indeed, the impressionistic aspects already evident here were to become even more apparent in later works.

It is interesting that the hauntingly beautiful tune upon which the **Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis** is based, was first harmonised by Vaughan Williams when, in the capacity of editor, he restored it to the English Hymnal of 1906, as the tune for Addison's hymn 'When rising from the bed of death'. Thomas Tallis had written the Phrygian tune in 1567 for Archbishop Parker's metrical Psalter, though in fact it never appeared therein.

The Tallis Fantasia came into being as the result of a commission for the Three Choirs Festival of 1910, when it was performed in Gloucester Cathedral, though a year earlier it had been produced by Sir Thomas Beecham in the Queen's Hall. Its appearance followed the composer's sojourn in Paris as a pupil of Maurice Ravel, and the clear-thinking Frenchman's influence is surely discernable in the masterpiece that is the Tallis Fantasia. Full of subtle dynamic gradations the work is scored for two string orchestras (one smaller) and string quartet and most of the antiphonal writing is dependent for its effect on carefully balanced tonal weight.

The late eminent critic Frank Howes has pointed out that the comparatively little imitative writing employed by Vaughan Williams gives weight to the opinion that the nature of the work is madrigalian, rather than Fantasia-like. It does, however, develop passages of considerable complexity and the composer was not satisfied until two revisions, in 1913 and 1919, had been made.

From then on the work passed into the international orchestral repertoire, its 'English' sound being no barrier to its acceptance abroad. It is noble and glorious music which has overcome national prejudices to take its permanent place among music's masterworks.

Commissioned by the British Council to represent English music at the 1939 World's Fair in America, Vaughan Williams's

Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus' was first performed in the USA under Sir Adrian Boult.

The title implies different versions of the same tune, but while this is true of the fifth variant, the first four are more strictly variations. The fifth variant was collected by the composer in Norfolk where it was known as 'The Murder of Maria Monk in the Red Barn'.

Parallel versions of the tune exist in Ireland as 'The Star of the County Down', in Scotland as 'Gilderoy' and in England as the carol 'Come all ye faithful Christians'. The ballad of 'Dives and Lazarus' (or 'Diverus and Lazarus') dates back to the sixteenth century and eventually became the story of the 'Murder in the Red Barn'. Although the Five Variants appeared thirty years after the Tallis Fantasia, it is clearly from the same brooding yet luminous pen and inspired by Vaughan Williams's great affection for this protean tune.

Scored for strings and harp the work, following a brief introduction, opens with a richly harmonised version of the tune. The first variant is in triple time, a rhythm not to be found in any other version of the ballad. In the second section the tune is merely suggested, while the third consists of a restatement followed by an F minor variation of itself. The fourth is livelier and is followed by the final variant played tutti and forte, with a coda in which a cello solo leads to some characteristic chording. This final section brings the piece to a formally satisfying conclusion.

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Bryden Thomson is held in high esteem for his major contribution to raising the stature of British orchestras. He has held posts as Principal Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic, BBC Welsh and Ulster Orchestras. Associate Conductor of the Scottish National and Assistant Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He is currently Principal Conductor of the RTE Symphony Orchestra and Conductor Laureate of the Ulster Orchestra.

The increasing interest in 20th century British music owes much to Bryden

Thomson, who has given premières of many important works by British and Irish composers and has done much to promote British music at home and abroad. He has championed composers such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Bax, Harty, Ireland and many others; his recordings of their music have won much world-wide acclaim and played a significant part in enhancing the reputation of both Chandos and the Ulster Orchestra, with which he began the complete cycle of Symphonies of Arnold Bax.

He maintains his interest in Scandinavian composers, including Sallinen, Holmboe, Nielsen and Sibelius, and he has been very active in the field of opera: as Conductor at the Norwegian Opera in Oslo, Royal Opera in Stockholm and at Scottish Opera. Television audiences will know him for his genial but straightforward manner in handling the young competitors in the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition.

In 1984 the New University of Ulster conferred on him an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters in recognition of his services to music in Ulster, and he recently received an award from the Scottish Composers Society.

A Chandos Digital Recording
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VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: NORFOLK RHAPSODY etc. LPO/Thomson

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