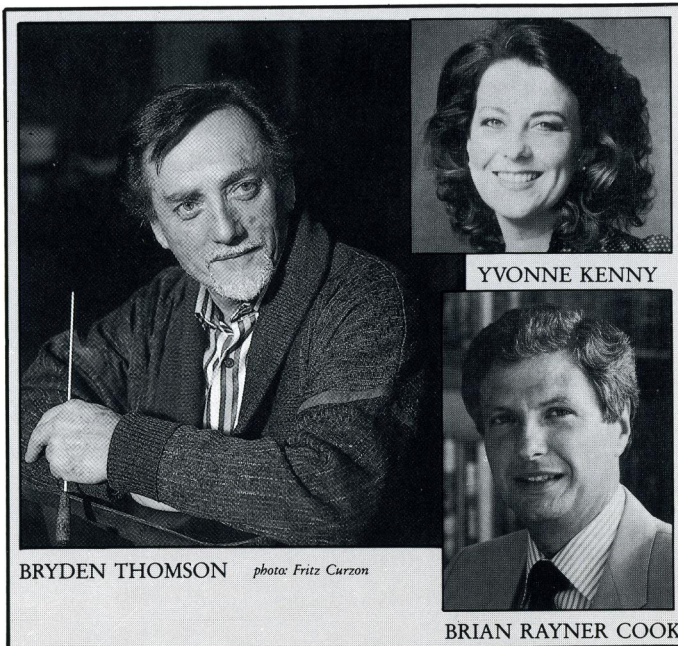
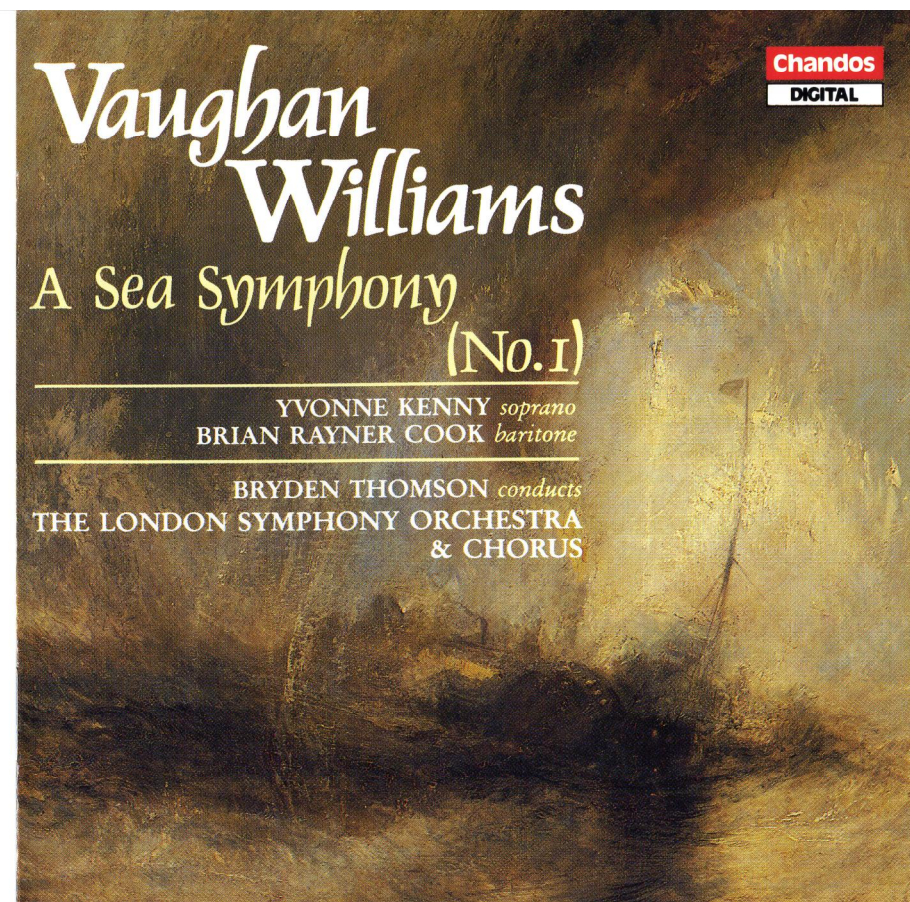


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CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, COLCHESTER, ENGLAND



Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

A Sea Symphony

for soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra
für Sopran, Bariton, Chor und Orchester
pour soprano, baryton, chœur et orchestre

Words by Walt Whitman

- 1 A Song for all Seas, all Ships (20:03)
Moderato maestoso
- 2 On the Beach at Night, alone (10:06)
Largo sostenuto
- 3 Scherzo — The Waves (8:03)
Allegro brillante
- 4 The Explorers (27:32) DDD
Grave e molto adagio TT = 66:03

YVONNE KENNY *soprano*

BRIAN RAYNER COOK *baritone*

BRYDEN THOMSON *conducts*

THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
& LONDON SYMPHONY CHORUS

Simon Joly *chorus master*

Roderick Elms *organ*

A Sea Symphony came as Vaughan Williams approached his maturity, during a period when choral music predominated but the orchestra was gaining more importance in his output. The sea was evidently an attractive subject to composers at that time, as is suggested by Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, Debussy's *La Mer*, Bridge's *The Sea*. And having decided to write a choral symphony about the sea, the choice of a text by Walt Whitman was almost inevitable, the riches of English poetry notwithstanding. This American poet had been introduced to Britain with selections from his *Leaves of Grass*, published here in 1868, and a large number of musical settings followed, among them Stanford's *Elegiac Ode*, Holst's *A Dirge for Two Veterans*, Delius's *Sea Drift* and Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*.

Among Whitman's attractions were that in his large pantheistic and humanitarian subjects he offered an alternative to Biblical themes, and that the lack of precise metrical patterns in his rhapsodic free verse was helpful to musical setting. Vaughan Williams had been introduced to Whitman's poetry by Bertrand Russell in the 1890s when they were both Cambridge undergraduates, and he admired it for the rest of his life. Indeed he achieved his first major recognition, at the Leeds Festival of 1907, with a Whitman setting, *Towards the Unknown Region*. By that time *A Sea Symphony* was well underway.

He in fact began in 1903, with sketches of the slow movement and scherzo, and at one stage was calling it the Ocean Symphony. A fifth movement, 'The Steersman,' was written and later rejected, and it was completed, in the usual four symphonic movements, by 1909. Now titled *A Sea Symphony*, it was first heard at the Leeds Festival of the following year, the composer conducting it on his 38th birthday, October 12th.

If it grew into such a large piece this was partly in response to Whitman's hymning of the unity of being and the brotherhood of man. The music suggests the sea in diverse moods, but the text likens a voyage on the sea to our journey through life — 'towards the unknown region.' As such it is the

opposite of Debussy's portrayal of the ocean, which famously suggests no human presence at all. Vaughan Williams's opening is unforgettable, a fanfare on the words 'Behold, the sea,' and this is followed by 'And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships.' This is set to a theme from an early symphonic poem, *The Solent*, which was to be used again much later, in Symphony No. 9.

These opening pages of 'A Song for all Seas, all Ships' are wonderfully exultant, and their mood is at first continued by the initial major baritone solo, which starts 'A rude brief recitative of ships sailing the seas' and goes on far more seriously to thoughts of sailors of all nations, 'The few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay.' The opening fanfare returns and leads to the first big soprano solo, beginning 'Flaunt out, O sea, your separate flags of nations,' and the chorus laments 'All that went down doing their duty.'

The orchestra comes to the fore in the slow movement, a Largo sostenuto titled 'On the Beach at Night, alone.' This is timeless music, and the baritone sings of 'All distances of space however wide, All distances of time, All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different...' The soloists are not called upon in 'The Waves,' a virtuoso outburst making great demands on the chorus. This scherzo forms a telling interlude between the slow movement's philosophising and the transcendent finale. In this, 'The Explorers,' the idea of the sea voyage as a metaphor for the journey of life itself is taken furthest, and when the chorus sings 'O vast Rondure, swimming in space' it is to a quintessential Vaughan Williams theme.

There are stylistic inconsistencies, debts to Stanford, Parry and, in this finale, to Elgar, but the best features of *A Sea Symphony* proved to be prophetic and were developed further in Vaughan Williams's subsequent works. Already there is no doubt of the music's visionary power, nor of the composer's ability to sustain his vision. The music ends in profound peace.

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Vaughan Williams nahm seine *Sea Symphony* zu Beginn seiner schöpferischen Reifezeit in Angriff, in einer Zeit, als Chormusik seine Kompositionstätigkeit beherrschte, als aber auch das Orchester für ihn eine zusehends wichtigere Rolle spielte. Das Meer war offenbar für die Musiker dieser Epoche ein besonders reizvolles Sujet — man denke an Elgars Orchesterlieder *Sea Pictures*, an Debussys *La Mer* oder Bridges' *The Sea*. Die Wahl von Gedichten Walt Whitmans lag nahe, denn dieser amerikanische Dichter war in England durch 1868 veröffentlichte Auszüge aus *Leaves of Grass* bekannt geworden, und zu den zahlreichen britischen Vertonungen seiner Lyrik gehören Werke wie Stanfords *Elegiac Ode*, Holsts *A Dirge for Two Veterans*, Delius' *Sea Drift* und schließlich auch Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony*.

Whitmans Dichtungen stellten in ihrem pantheistisch-humanistischen Anliegen eine Alternative zu den im späten viktorianischen England vorherrschenden biblischen Themen dar, und auch das Fehlen strenger metrischer Muster machte ihn bei Komponisten beliebt. Vaughan Williams war in den 1890er Jahren durch Bertrand Russell in Cambridge mit Whitmans Werken bekannt gemacht worden, und er bewunderte den Amerikaner sein ganzes Leben lang. Es war eine Whitman-Vertonung (*Towards the Unknown Region*), mit der er 1907 beim Leeds Festival erstmals einer breiteren Öffentlichkeit vorgestellt wurde.

Er begann die *Sea Symphony* im Jahre 1903 mit Skizzen zum langsamen Satz und zum Scherzo. Zunächst war *Ocean Symphony* als Titel geplant, der 5. Satz "The Steersman" wurde später verworfen, und 1909 lagen die traditionellen vier symphonischen Sätze fertig vor. Die Uraufführung fand am 12. Oktober des folgenden Jahres statt, vom Komponisten am Tag seines 38. Geburtstags selbst dirigiert.

Whitmans Hymne auf die Einheit alles Lebens und die Verbrüderung aller Menschen verlangte ein großformatig angelegtes Werk. Die Musik beschreibt das Meer in verschiedenen Stimmungen, während der Text eine Schiffsreise mit der Reise des Lebens vergleicht, die "zu unbekannten Regionen" führt.

Das Werk ist das genaue Gegenteil zu Debussys Meerbildern, in denen der Mensch überhaupt keine Rolle spielt. Vaughan Williams beginnt mit einer unvergeßlichen Fanfare zu den Worten "Behold, the sea" und dem Verweis auf die Schiffe "on its limitless, heaving breast" — zu einem Thema aus der frühen symphonischen Dichtung *The Solent*, die auch für die 9. Symphonie verwendet wurde.

Der Beginn von "A Song for all Seas, all Ships" ist von mitreißendem Überschwang, und diese Stimmung wird mit dem ersten großen Bariton-Solo fortgesetzt, dessen Betrachtungen sich den Seeleuten aller Völker zuwenden, "The few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay." Die Anfangsfanfare kehrt zurück und leitet in das erste große Sopran-Solo über — "Flaunt out, O sea, your separate flags of nations" — und der Chor beklagt die Seeleute, die bei ihrer Pflichterfüllung untergehen.

Das Orchester tritt im langsamen Satz in den Vordergrund, ein Largo sostenuto mit dem Titel "On the Beach at Night, alone". Die Musik ist zeitlos, und der Bariton singt von den weiten Dimensionen und Entfernungen des Ozeans. In "The Waves", einem ungemein virtuosischen Ausbruch, spielt statt der Vokalsolisten der Chor die Hauptrolle; dieses Scherzo bildet einen ausdrucksvollen Kontrast zu dem tiefsinnigen langsamen Satz und dem verklärten Finale, "The Explorers". Hier wird die Metapher von der Schiffsfahrt als Lebensreise weiter ausgeführt, und der Chor singt sein "O vast Rondure, swimming in space" zu einem für Vaughan Williams wesentlich charakteristischen Thema.

Man kann auf stilistische Inkonsistenz verweisen, etwa auf die Vorbilder Stanford, Parry und (im Finale) Elgar, aber die durchaus individuellen Merkmale der *Sea Symphony* erwiesen sich als eine richtige Prophezeiung. Die visionäre Kraft der Musik steht außer Frage, ebenso wenig wie die Fähigkeit des Komponisten, seine Visionen auf anschauliche Weise mitzuteilen. Die Musik verklingt in tiefem Frieden.

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Vaughan Williams komponierte *A Sea Symphony* à l'approche de sa maturité, à une époque où la musique chorale prédominait dans son œuvre mais où l'orchestre croissait en importance. La mer était à l'évidence un sujet attrayant pour les compositeurs de l'époque, ainsi qu'en témoignent *Sea Pictures* d'Elgar, *La Mer* de Debussy, *The Sea* de Bridge. Une fois la décision prise d'écrire une symphonie chorale sur la mer, le choix d'un texte de Walt Whitman était presque inévitable, malgré les richesses de la poésie anglaise. Ce poète américain était connu en Grande-Bretagne depuis qu'y avaient été publiées en 1868 des sélections de ses *Leaves of Grass*, qui inspirèrent un grand nombre d'œuvres musicales, entre autres *Elegiac Ode* de Stanford, *A Dirge for Two Veterans* d'Holst, *Sea Drift* de Delius et *A Sea Symphony* de Vaughan Williams.

Les principales attractions de Whitman étaient qu'il offrait avec ses grands sujets panthéistes et humanitaires une alternative aux thèmes bibliques, et que l'absence de schéma métrique précis dans ses vers libres rhapsodiques facilitait la mise en musique. Bertrand Russell avait fait connaître la poésie de Whitman à Vaughan Williams dans les années 1890 alors qu'ils étaient tous deux étudiants à Cambridge, et il l'admira toute sa vie. De fait, il obtint son premier succès important, au festival de Leeds en 1907, avec la mise en musique d'un texte de Whitman, *Towards the Unknown Region*. *A Sea Symphony* était à cette date déjà bien avancée.

Il la commença en fait en 1903, avec des esquisses du mouvement lent et du scherzo, et l'intitula un temps *Ocean Symphony*. Un cinquième mouvement, "The Steersman", fut écrit et plus tard rejeté, et elle fut achevée, sous la forme des quatre mouvements symphoniques habituels, en 1909. Intitulée maintenant *A Sea Symphony*, elle fut exécutée pour la première fois au festival de Leeds l'année suivante, sous la direction du compositeur le jour de son 38ème anniversaire, le 12 octobre.

Ses vastes dimensions sont en partie une réponse à l'hymne à l'unité de l'être et à la fraternité humaine de Whitman. La musique évoque les humeurs

différentes de la mer, mais le texte compare un voyage en mer au voyage de la vie — “vers les régions inconnues”. En tant que telle, c’est l’opposé du portrait de l’océan par Debussy, qui suggère merveilleusement l’absence totale de toute présence humaine. L’ouverture de Vaughan Williams, fanfare sur les mots “Behold, the sea”, est inoubliable, et elle est suivie par “And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships”, mis en musique sur un thème tiré d’un poème symphonique antérieur, *The Solent*, qui allait être encore utilisé beaucoup plus tard dans la Symphonie no. 9.

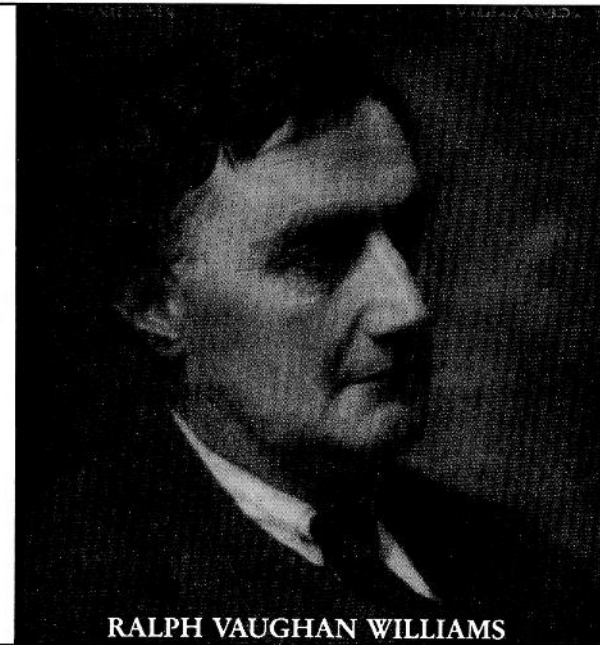
Ces premières pages de “A Song for all Seas, all Ships” sont merveilleusement triomphantes, et leur atmosphère se prolonge tout d’abord dans le grand solo initial pour baryton, qui commence par “A rude brief recitative of ships sailing the seas” et se poursuit beaucoup plus sérieusement avec une réflexion sur les marins de toutes les nations, “The few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay.” La fanfare d’ouverture revient pour introduire le premier grand solo pour soprano, “Flaunt out, O sea, your separate flags of nations”, et le chœur pleure “All that went down doing their duty”.

L’orchestre prend la vedette dans le mouvement lent, un Largo sostenuto intitulé “On the Beach at Night, alone.” Musique éternelle, le baryton y chante “All distances of space however wide, All distances of time, All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different...”. Les solistes n’ont pas de rôle à jouer dans “The Waves”, brillante explosion qui exige beaucoup du chœur. Ce scherzo forme un interlude éloquent entre le mouvement lent philosophe et le finale transcendant. Dans ce dernier, “The Explorers”, la métaphore du voyage en mer comme représentation du voyage de la vie est poussée plus loin, et quand le chœur chante “O vast Rondure, swimming in space” c’est sur un thème qui contient toute l’essence de la musique de Vaughan Williams.

Il y a des incohérences de style, des emprunts à Stanford, à Parry, et dans le finale, à Elgar, mais les meilleurs traits de *A Sea Symphony* s’avèrent

prophétiques et furent développés davantage dans les œuvres suivantes de Vaughan Williams. Déjà la puissance visionnaire de la musique est indubitable, ainsi que la capacité du compositeur à soutenir sa vision. La musique s’achève dans une paix profonde.

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RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

1. A Song for all Seas, all Ships

Baritone, Soprano, Chorus

Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships;
See, where their white sails, bellying in the wind, speckle the green and blue,
See, the steamers coming and going, steaming in or out of port,
See, dusky and undulating, the long pennants of smoke.
Behold, the sea itself,
And on its limitless, heaving breast, the ships.

Baritone

Today a rude brief recitative,
Of ships sailing the seas, each with its special flag or ship-signal,
Of unnamed heroes in the ships — of waves spreading and spreading far as the eye can reach,
Of dashing spray, and the winds piping and blowing,
And out of these a chant for the sailors of all nations,
Fitful, like a surge.
Of sea-captains young or old, and the mates, and of all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay,
Picked sparingly without noise by thee old ocean, chosen by thee,
Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time, and unitest the nations,
Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,
Indomitable, untamed as thee.

Soprano

Flaunt out, O sea, your separate flags of nations!
Flaunt out visible as ever the various flags and ship-signals!
But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul of man one flag above all the rest,
A spiritual woven signal for all nations, emblem of man elate above death,
Token of all brave captains and of all intrepid sailors and mates,
And all that went down doing their duty,
Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid captains young or old,

Baritone

A pennant universal, subtly waving all time, o'er all brave sailors,
All seas, all ships.

2. On the Beach at Night, alone

Baritone, Chorus

On the beach at night, alone,
As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,
As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future.
A vast similitude interlocks all,
All distances of space however wide,
All distances of time,
All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different,
All nations, all indentities that have existed or may exist,
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future,
This vast similitude spans them, and always has spanned,
And shall forever span them and shall compactly hold and enclose them.

3. (Scherzo) The Waves

Chorus

After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,
After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,
Below, a myriad, myriad waves hastening, lifting up their necks,
Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,
Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying,
Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven, emulous waves,
Toward that whirling current, laughing and buoyant with curves,
Where the great vessel sailing and tacking displaced the surface,
Larger and smaller waves in the spread of the ocean yearnfully flowing,
The wake of the sea-ship after she passes, flashing and frolicsome under the sun,
A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many fragments,
Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.

4. The Explorers

Baritone, Soprano, Chorus

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,
Covered all over with visible power and beauty,
Alternate light and day and the teeming spiritual darkness,
Unspeaking high processions of sun and moon and countless stars above,
Below, the manifold grass and waters,
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention,
Now first it seems my thought begins to span thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia descending,
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them,
Wandering, yearning, with restless explorations, with questionings, baffled, formless,
feverish, with never-happy hearts, with that sad incessant refrain, — *'Wherefore
unsatisfied soul? Whither O mocking life?'*

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children?
Who justify these restless explorations?
Who speak the secret of the impassive earth?

Yet soul be sure the first intent remains, and shall be carried out,
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.
After the seas are all crossed,
After the great Captains have accomplished their work,
After the noble inventors,
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

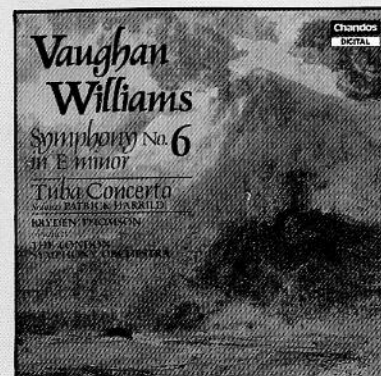
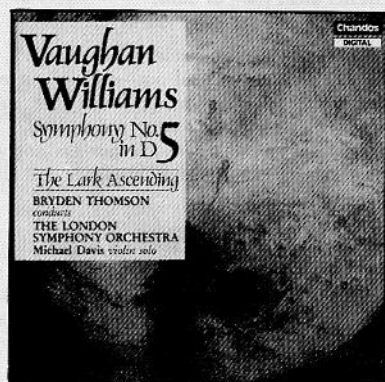
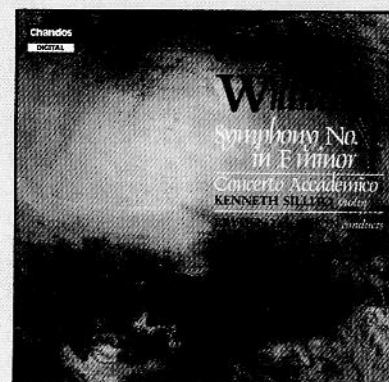
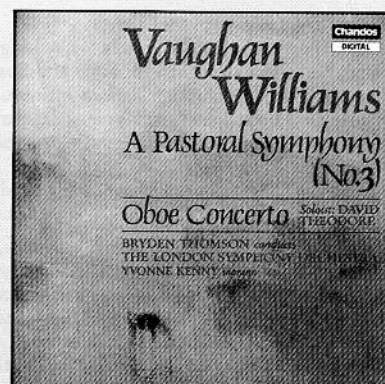
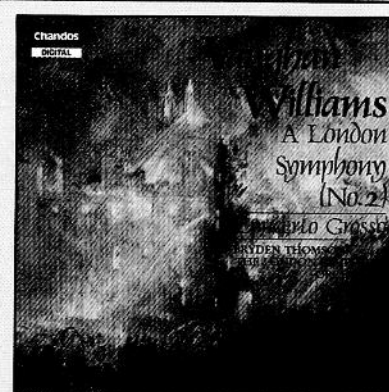
O we can wait no longer,
We too take ship O Soul,
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,
Amid the wafting winds (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O Soul),
Caroling free, singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

O Soul thou pleasest me, I thee,
Sailing these seas or on the hills, or waking in the night,
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space and Death, like water flowing,
Bear me indeed as through regions infinite,
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear, lave me all over,
Bathe me, O God, in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them.
Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee O Soul, thou actual me,
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.
Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding O Soul thou journeyest forth;

Away O Soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
Cut the hawsers — haul out — shake out every sail!
Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,
Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave Soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

Walt Whitman



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VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: A SEA SYMPHONY — LSO & Chorus/Thomson

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